Cecil Rosse

A SEQUEL TO

"Edith Trevor's Secret."

By Mrs. Harriet Lewis.

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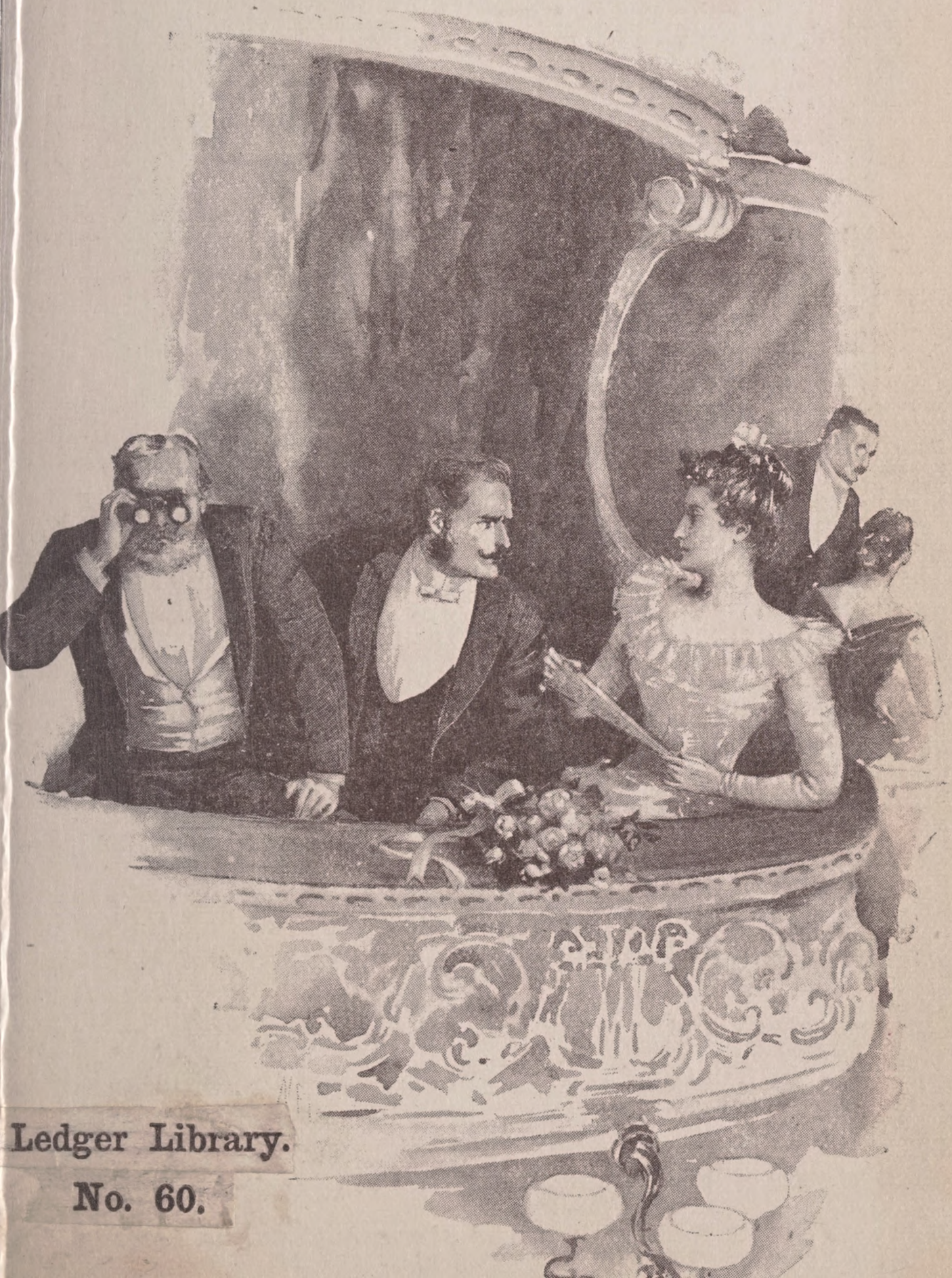

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CECIL ROSSE.

CHAPTER I.

A MOUNTAIN-EYRIE.

UPON the north-west coast of Scotland, in a region of utter wildness and savageness, over which broods eternally an air of awful desolation, a dreary promontory pushes itself boldly out into the seething sea, like the head of some huge and terrible monster.

This promontory is known as Black Rock.

Its precipitous face rises steeply from the ocean to a height of several hundred feet, and in its many jagged crevices the eider ducks breed unmolested by even the most adventurous hunter. Sea-gulls circle about its top, filling the air with their wild

screams, adding their share to the weird strangeness of the scene.

Black Rock is far remote from all the haunts of men. The nearest cluster of fishermen's huts, or shepherd's cabins, is many, many miles away. No adventurous tourist ever treads the dangerous mountain passes that lead to Black Rock; no guide-book even contains its name. It is supposed to be out of the pale of human seeking, and even the fishermen upon the coast give it a wide berth, because of the treacherous, hidden rocks outlying it, their pointed, jagged tops, like sharks' teeth, ever gaping for prey.

Yet, despite the terrible loneliness of a spot so forsaken by man, and apparently forgotten by its Creator, a house stands upon the summit of Black Rock—a long, low, gray stone house of rambling shape, with a tall lookout tower commanding a magnificent view of the sea. The house is hidden in a thick growth of scrubby pines and hemlocks, so as scarcely to be seen from the sea, or even from the land until one stands at its very portal.

The old house of Black Rock has a tragic history in keeping with its surroundings.

A powerful Highland family once dwelt within its walls. This family became reduced in size as in power until, at last, two brothers, the last of their race, only remained to keep the old hearthstone warm.

These brothers, born in one hour, and devotedly attached to each other, as twins are apt to be, fell both in love with the same lady, a beautiful Low-

land heiress. She played fast and loose with them, and secretly engaged herself to both. With the new love came a breaking up of the old. Jealousy crept in and made a wide breach between the two young men who had never before in all their lives known an hour's alienation.

The younger son, fiery, impetuous, and passionate yet withal noble and tender-hearted, retired to the wild Highland fastness, confident of the faith of his betrothed, and meditating upon schemes of reconciling his brother to his expected marriage.

That brother remained in Edinburgh, and paid such assiduous court to the Lowland heiress that she, discovering him to be the heir of his ancestral estates, yielded to his pleadings and became his bride.

No intimation of the marriage was sent to the young and trusting lover at Black Rock. The happy husband, unconscious of the treachery of his bride, planned to surprise his brother, and bought and fitted up a beautiful yacht, in which he sailed with his false young bride for his northern eyrie.

In those days the place lacked much of the desolation of the present time. A score of Highland servants, trusted old retainers, who were in reality humble friends of the family, filled the servant's hall. The stables contained many horses of rugged Highland breed. Boats filled the little harbor sheltered by the promontory.

Guests thronged the great halls and quaint, low drawing-rooms, coming many days' journey and often remaining months at a time. The gardens

were bright with bloom during the brief summers, and all the year round the Black Rock conservatories held a wealth of tropical blossom and verdure in striking contrast to the rugged native productions.

To this home the favored elder brother brought his wife. The yacht sailed into the little harbor one summer afternoon near the hour of sunset, and the gay bridal party, numbering a score of persons, came swarming up the cliff by the flight of steps cut in the rocks.

They were met at the main entrance, upon the very threshold, by the deceived younger twin. The elder gaily introduced his wife. The younger stood appalled like a statue of marble. But as he comprehended the whole fatal truth, how he had been tricked and deceived by the smiling coquette he had so trusted, passion overcame the love of a lifetime, a very whirlwind of fury seized his soul.

He leaped backward, caught from the wall of the great hall a sword his grandfather had wielded in some memorable battle, tore it from its scabbard, and hurled himself upon his brother. Before the horrified spectators could recover from the stupor of amazement that held them enthralled, the hapless bridegroom fell to the floor, literally hewn to pieces.

The murderer, horror-stricken at his crime, backed his way to the edge of the cliff, protecting his retreat with the dripping sword, and hurled himself over the precipice into eternity.

His mangled corpse was found among the rocks and buried with a stake driven through its breast.

The bride became a hopeless maniac, and lingered

out her long life in a padded cell in an insane asylum at Edinburgh.

The scene of the tragedy was abandoned by the old retainers, the old house was closed, and only one old couple was found to remain upon the estate. They dwelt in a hut near the great house, but were careful never to visit it after nightfall.

The property reverted to a distant connection of the family who was wealthy and never visited his new acquisition. The fields and pastures went to waste, the Highland cattle grew wild and fierce, the gardens became a wilderness, and the old stone dwelling began to show signs of age.

Fifty years had passed since the date of the tragedy, and the scene of long-past gayety had become what we have described. The old house was believed to be haunted by the spirits of the two brothers, and in fishers' hamlets, fifty miles down the coast, the story of the last of the Cathcairns was told in shuddering whispers, in the Gaelic tongue, about the smoking peat-fires on wintry nights, and when a wilder blast of wind than usual blew in from the Atlantic, the simple peasants half-believed it the wail of those lost souls.

The old couple who had dwelt in the hut, and taken some care of the estate, had removed to the southward when the infirmities of years crept on, and had died there. No one had ever been found to take their place, but the tradition of the spot sufficed to protect the house and its contents from depredation and even from visits. From one year's end to the other, no one ever came by sea or land to

desolate Black Rock, upon which so heavy a curse seemed to have fallen.

But fishermen, occasionally sailing at a distance from the promontory, told of spectral lights that burned on dark nights in the old tower, and surmised that the ghosts of the Cathcairns would never know rest while one stone of the old structure remained upon another.

The time in which we introduce the old house to the attention of the reader, is a blustering afternoon in that very month of March, when the London detectives announced to Lord Glenham their belief that Cecil Rosse was dead and that further search for her would be time lost.

A faint smoke was curling from one of the chimneys of the Black Rock dwelling.

At a small mullioned window of the third story of the tower, a girl stood looking out over the tops of the scrubby pines at the sea.

The panes of glass were small and diamond-shaped, and heavily set in lead, in ancient fashion. The girl's face, wan and wistful, was pressed close against the window, while her eager, mournful eyes surveyed the scene with intense dreariness.

The sea, a leaden surface lashed to a white fury by the March wind, was nearly hidden by a thick white whirl of falling snow.

The girl who gazed so wistfully out into the storm was no ghost of a perjured coquette, but a living reality. She was slender and graceful as a willow, with a youthful majesty of bearing as remarkable as it rendered her distinguished. Despite her pallor

and thinness, her splendid young beauty was unmarred in a single line or feature.

The red-brown hair with a golden shimmer upon its loose waves, her red-brown eyes with a golden glint in their depths, reminding one of a yellow star reflected from a clear deep well, the tender, sensitive, lovely young mouth, the fairness, the sweetness, the unfaltering courage shown in look and attitude—surely these were the features and attributes of the lost young girl for whom so many had searched so long and vainly !

The girl was Cecil Rosse !

The room was large and long, and was connected by a half-open door with a second chamber of similar size.

There were four or five windows, all overlooking the sea. There was a wide and yawning fire-place, large as a small room. A fire of logs blazed in it. The floor was covered with a heavy but faded old carpet that had done good service sixty years before. A half-dozen, old-fashioned, straight-backed chairs, and sofas of similar pattern, with a lady's work-table, a writing-table, and various other conveniences for lady-like employment, comprized the furniture.

The low walls were hung with ancient tapestry of French manufacture, and of great age. These hangings had formerly decorated the drawing-room; but had been removed to this chamber for greater convenience of repair.

A high chair stood before a section of tapestry that had been enclosed in a small embroidery frame. A needle threaded with red wool was thrust into the

canvas. A second high chair close to the other supported a basket of gay balls of wool, a cushion for needles, and other appurtenances for sewing.

Cecil had been hard at work until the waning light had compelled her to cease from her toil. She had been steadily at work for months upon her task of renovation, and was physically tired, but the wistfulness and sadness of her face indicated a depression of spirits also that was even harder to bear.

The history of her sojourn at Black Rock House can be briefly told.

The yacht that Mr. Pulford had chartered for his villainous purpose had made a long voyage up the western coasts of England and Scotland, encountering much bad weather, during which Cecil and old Gretchen kept their berths, and had finally come to anchor about midnight one starlit night in Black Rock Harbor.

Miss Rosse, Gretchen, and Maria, the Portuguese stewardess, had been hurried ashore and piloted up to the house, which was found to be tenanted by two persons, a married couple, newly arrived, and to be opened and aired for occupancy.

Miss Rosse and her servant believed themselves at Greycourt, in Yorkshire. The occupants of the house profited by their ignorance and did not undeceive them. The new-comers were shown to the rooms in the tower that had been hastily fitted up for them, and Maria established herself as Miss Rosse's especial servant and keeper.

The yacht sailed away before daybreak, and

headed for Holland, according to Mr. Pulford's instructions. Mr. Pulford had improved upon his original plan and bought the yacht outright, at half its value. When the vessel arrived at Amsterdam, he was there to meet it.

The seamen who had been employed upon it were nearly all foreigners. He discharged them, and noted with satisfaction that they shipped in a body the next day upon an East Indiaman, which found itself short-handed on the very eve of a voyage to Java. The ship sailed, and Mr. Pulford hired a sufficient crew to convey the yacht back to London, where he succeeded in selling it within a month of its return.

The couple who were found in charge of Black Rock House were an elderly and avaricious pair, who had done Mr. Pulford much service in days gone by, and who were too deeply in his power to gainsay his commands. As they were to be well paid for the work in hand, and as the man was being eagerly sought for by the police upon some criminal charge, their retirement to this solitude was regarded by them as an especial instance of good fortune, of which they were more than prompt to take advantage.

Miss Rosse and her old servant were treated with consideration and kindness by Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, as well as by Maria, the Portuguese woman, and not the faintest suspicion that they were actually prisoners ever crossed the minds of the pair.

Many things seemed strange to them in their new residence, and in the conduct and appearance of

their attendants ; but Cecil, who was keener-witted than Gretchen, was too occupied with her work to pay much heed to these indications.

At first the girl had been delighted with the wildness and savage grandeur of the scenery, but when winter came with its furious northern blasts and driving storms the terrible loneliness of the place oppressed her. She began to be tired of the ceaseless roar of the waves as they beat against Black Rock, and to long for the sounds of human life, the noise of city streets, the sight of more pleasant faces than those that met her gaze in this strange new existence.

She had made the best of her sojourn in the remote Highlands, having taken long walks every day when the weather permitted, attended by Gretchen and Maria, but there were weeks together when the high drifts of snow and tempestuous winds kept her within doors, to the detriment of her health and spirits.

She was still looking out of the window, when the door opening upon the stone corridor was pushed ajar and Gretchen came in.

" It's a wild night, Miss Cecil," said the old peasant woman. " The sea beats against the rocks like the tolling of a funeral bell. And the snow is whirling in great drifts. There'll be no walking for a fortnight."

Cecil turned about abruptly.

" Don't prophecy such terrible things, Gretchen," she exclaimed. " I could never endure to remain

here another fortnight. I am anxious to return to London."

"And so am I, my pet," said the old servant, affectionately. "Haven't I seen you pine and chafe at this prison-like place, although you are too brave and patient to say one word against it? How comes on the work?"

"It will be done to-morrow night. After nearly six months of constant labor, the task will be finished in a few hours."

"And well finished too, Miss Cecil. You have faded your wools in the sun to make them match these faded tints, and you've fitted in your bits of canvas as if they had grown there, and you've designed figures to fill up the missing places, and even Lady Trevor herself would be puzzled to find the places were the holes were. Her ladyship will pay you a good price, but you'll earn the money, I'll say that."

"It has been a hard winter's work, but I shall not regret our coming if we can get away soon," said Miss Rosse. "I had formed such different ideas of Yorkshire. It took us many days to reach this place—"

"Because we were driven out of our course by bad weather," interrupted Gretchen, giving the captain's false excuse for the long voyage.

"And this house is not at all like my idea of an English country seat," said innocent Cecil. "It might be delightful in summer, but it is terrible in winter. We have been storm-bound for months. We have never seen a human being since we came

here except the three belonging to the house. We might as well be on a rock in mid-ocean, we are so cut off from all intercourse with the world. And these grim and awful mountains shutting us in upon the landward side, and the grim and awful sea hemming us in on the water side, make the spot seem a natural prison. Yorkshire is very different from the description of it in the geographies. The scenery and the climate, the loneliness and desolation, correspond to my ideas of life near the North Pole."

"I don't know anything about geographies, Miss Cecil," responded the old peasant woman, "but I wish we were back in London, or in our own dear Black Forest. The letters you've written this winter to Mrs. Thomas, and the new Herr Pastor at Zorlitz, and that I wrote to that kind Mr. Crafton, have never been sent, because Mr. Jarvis has not been able to leave this place over a day at a time. I notice that Mrs. Jarvis called this estate Black Rock the other day, instead of Greycourt She told me that it was known as Black Rock before Lady Trevor bought it, and I thought the old name the most appropriate."

"I think so, too," said Cecil. "How dark it's growing! Ring for lights, Gretchen."

The young girl took a last look into the white darkness without, but the sea was no longer visible. She could not distinguish the whirling gusts of snow, and the sky was hidden from her keenest glances.

Gretchen rang for lights, and Maria brought up

two tall wax candles, which she deposited on the high mantelpiece. The Portuguese woman then drew out a small, round table which she proceeded to lay for supper.

"How comes on the embroidery, Miss?" she inquired, in broken English, as she went on with her task.

"It will be done to-morrow," replied Cecil. "And I must start for London the day after."

"Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Maria. "The roads will be impassable for two weeks at least."

"Then I must signal the first fishing-boat I see," declared Miss Rosse. "I cannot stay here longer. My friends will be anxious about me. Some fishing vessel will carry me down the coast to the nearest town, I know."

Maria's swarthy visage darkened visibly.

"You'd better be content, Miss," she replied, in a constrained voice. "You'll have to stay a month or two, at the least—"

"I will not. If I cannot get away by boat, I'll try the road to the nearest house," said Cecil, having not the faintest suspicion of how many miles lay between Black Rock and the "nearest house." "Gretchen and I cannot endure this solitude longer. I shall see Mr. Jarvis to-morrow. He must contrive some plan to convey us to the nearest town this very week."

A tap at the door announced the presence of Mrs. Jarvis. Maria obeyed the summons, receiving from the housekeeper a tray loaded with food of excellent quality, well-cooked and well-served. A veni-

son-steak, steaming hot, a pot of fragrant tea, hot roasted potatoes, and crisp buttered toast made up a repast sufficient in quantity for two persons.

Miss Rosse dismissed Maria, and was waited upon by Gretchen, who jealously refused to allow the Portuguese to wait upon her young mistress at the table or the toilet.

"Venison-steak needs currant jelly," said the old peasant woman, who had learned many things, besides a tolerable knowledge of the English language, during her stay at Black Rock. "I wonder Mrs. Jarvis forgot it. I'll go and get it!"

Unheeding Cecil's remonstrance, she hurried out. She came back five minutes later, pale and excited, trembling like a leaf, and having a most mysterious air.

"Hush!" she whispered, holding up one finger warningly. "Follow me, Miss Cecil. Throw your cloak over your shoulders, for the halls are full of draughts. You understand English so well that you will know what they mean better than I. Come, Miss Cecil. For the Lord's sake, don't stop to question. There's something up—there's something terribly wrong going on—and we must find out what it is."

CHAPTER II.

EAVESDROPPING.

There was something so startled and startling in the manner of old Gretchen that Miss Rosse was seized with a quick and vivid alarm. She arose immediately, not stopping to question the old woman, and received from her servant's hands her arge cloak, which she gathered about her shoulders.

"Follow me, Miss Cecil," said Gretchen. "Not a word! Be silent as death—but come!"

The old woman opened the door and led the way into the hall. They glided along over the stone floor, the cold gusts of wind that traversed the corridors striking a chill to Cecil's bones.

Gretchen conducted her young mistress down a flight of narrow stone steps through a lower corridor, down another flight of steps, and through a long stone passage in which impenetrable darkness reigned. Cecil clung to her old servant as they sped on together.

"Where are we going?" whispered the young mistress at last, beginning to recover from the vague terror that had rendered her so quietly obedient

to Gretchen's will. "To the kitchen—the servant's hall?"

"Hush!" said the old woman, in a warning whisper. "Here we are!"

They had arrived before the massive, oaken door leading to the kitchen. Gretchen stooped and peeped through the key-hole. Then, arising, she gently pressed her mistress to occupy her place.

"Look!" she whispered.

Cecil involuntarily obeyed.

Looking through the immense and ancient key-hole, she beheld the interior of the large, low kitchen, with its great fireplace filled with blazing logs, its dresser laden with dishes and tins, and a table in the glow of the firelight, upon which was spread a bountiful supper.

Around the table were gathered Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, and Maria, the Portuguese woman.

The husband and wife were by no means a prepossessing-looking pair. The former was a man of middle-age, with a square-built, heavy frame, with brawny arms disproportionately long, and with a bullet-head set upon a short, thick neck. He looked rough and coarse and brutal, and his mental and moral characteristics corresponded with his external appearance.

Mrs. Jarvis was also middle-aged, and heavily built. She had more natural refinement than her husband, and her intellect was also superior to his in strength and keenness. But morally she was no better than he. The two had sprung from the

lowest class of London life, and were familiar with crime.

The three had evidently finished their repast. The Portuguese woman was leaning both elbows upon the table, addressing her companions in very good English, she having acquired considerable facility in the use of that tongue since her arrival at Black Rock.

Miss Rosse was about to rise and withdraw from the contemplation of this scene, with a sense of rising indignation against Gretchen for so needlessly alarming her, when her old servant, divining her intention, held her in her place with a determined hand.

In the same instant Maria's voice penetrated to the young lady's ears.

"The trouble we've so long looked forward to is close at hand," Maria's sibilant tones were saying. "You may sneer at me if you will, but I repeat—this quiet young lady, with her soft and gentle ways, is likely to be a very troublesome customer. Once let her suspect the truth, and we shall have our hands full!"

"She needn't suspect the truth for a month yet," observed Mrs. Jarvis. "One storm will succeed another, the roads will continue impassable, and her going can be put off upon excuses as even she will have to accept as reasonable!"

"But she means to signal a boat!"

"We must prevent that!" said Mr. Jarvis, with a rough oath.

"There it is!" cried Maria. "If you prevent the

signal, how are you going to keep from her the fact that she is a prisoner ?"

Cecil started. What could they mean ?

"Well," responded Mrs. Jarvis, coolly, "if she forces us to tell her the truth, let the truth be spoken. As well first as last. Won't she open her eyes when she finds that she ain't at Greycourt at all, nor in Yorkshire—as she couldn't have been imposed on only for being a foreigner—and that this ain't no Lady Trevor's house."

"And that her embroidery-work has all been a humbug," cried Mr. Jarvis.

"And that she has been a prisoner all these months while she thought herself so free," said Maria.

Cecil Rosse was appalled. That some stupendous piece of villainy was in progress, and that she was its intended victim, forced itself upon her convictions. She clung to the door-knob, leaning upon it heavily.

"It's the rummiest piece of business I ever engaged into," observed Mr. Jarvis. "Here we've kept watch all these months over a young woman as never has even imagined she was our prisoner, and has took her walks along of a keeper—you, Maria—never suspecting your real character ! It is the beatenest thing ! Lor', if that young woman know'd who we really is, she'd jest faint with horror ! Her deliket stummick couldn't stand the shock !"

"An' such a winter as we've had !" exclaimed Mrs. Jarvis, discontentedly. "Snow and ice and wind till I'm that sick of 'em all I should prefer Botomy Bay. If we had that big sum of money as

is promised us, we could go wherever we liked, we could settle that there business of yours, Jarvis, with the police, and live like kings—that's what we could!"

"Yes, but the big sum of money as you speak of," responded Jarvis, "only comes under one condition."

"And that condition is the girl's death!" said Mrs. Jarvis, in a low, suppressed voice which yet distinctly reached the ears of the listeners.

Cecil stood as if petrified. There was a deadly meaning in the looks and tones of the three plotters—a horrible earnestness that would not permit her to doubt that they were speaking words of truth.

But what was this frightful conspiracy against her? Did some one seek her liberty, and even her life? A cold sweat sprang out upon her face. Her heart seem to cease its beating. Yet her hearing, preternaturally quickened, heard all that followed.

"If I get the sum that's promised me," said Maria, her greasy dark face full of scheming, "I shall go back to my own country and buy a house and keep a servant and live like a lady. And I shall make a good marriage with that dowry. I wish the girl was dead."

"So do I!" said Mrs. Jarvis, sullenly. "Her life is all that stands between me and what I most desire!"

"I suppose you know as that life is a small obstacle," said Mrs. Jarvis. "A very small obstacle. indeed. And our employer, he wants her dead, What's to hinder our facilitatin' natur, so to speak?"

The three looked at each other with evil significance.

Gretchen clutched her young mistress by the shoulder with an unconsciously fierce grip.

"Well," said Mrs. Jarvis, slowly, "it is the spirit of our employer's words, if not the letter of 'em, to hurry up her death. We've done worse things, Jarvis, nor that."

"I am willing," said Maria, eagerly. "I want my money. With that for a dowry I can marry a man I know and set up a cabaret. I'd buy the house, and be mistress of it. I've got it all planned, and to be kept here by a slender girl—a mere baby in strength—bah! I won't stand it, if you do!"

"We ain't so exactly anxious to fool away time here neither," said Jarvis. "Why, the gal may live years if left to herself. Them slender uns is the very scratch for hanging on to life sometimes. And she's a strong-willed un, as brave as a lion. I've seen it in her eyes."

"After you've taken a glass too much," said his wife, with a sneer. "We are all agreed as we couldn't stand another winter here?"

"We are!" said the others, in a breath.

"And we're agreed as we'd like our money immediate?"

"We are!"

"Then," said Mrs. Jarvis, "how are we going to get it? How shall we get rid of the girl? How shall we compass her death?"

Gretchen leaned more heavily upon her young mistress, breathing hard.

"Hush!" muttered Maria. "What's that noise?"

They all listened. A silence like that of death reigned.

"It must have been a rat," said Jarvis. "There's awful rats in this house, big enough to eat up a cat. I wish my hounds outside was rat-terriers; then you'd see sport."

"Miss Rosse is safe in her room, eating her venison steak," said Mrs. Jarvis, "and planning her signals, or packing her trunk. Lor', to think a human being in this here nineteenth century can be so unsuspicious-like, and honest and baby-like as she is, is wonderful. She was brought up among peasants in a black forest somewheres, and that German creetur is as stupid as a cow. Don't know beans!"

"But we'll have to get rid of her along with her missus," said Jarvis. "Old Gretchen is a cow as I shouldn't wish to leave alive to tell tales on us."

"And how's the thing to be done?" questioned Maria. "Poison?"

"Or pushing over the cliff?" suggested Mrs. Jarvis. "That would be an excellent plan."

"Or smothering with a bolster," said Jarvis, "like a man I see onst to a theatre. He was jealous and smothered his wife—"

"You mean Lothario," interrupted Mrs. Jarvis. "The deed had better be done quiet. I know a poison weed to stew up with their coffee. We can talk the thing over at our leisure now we've decided to kill them. We can't get away from this place safely under a month. I don't want to stay under

this roof one night after their deaths, for fear they'd ha'nt us. Such things is, they say, and I won't risk it!"

"You're right. Let 'em live till we are ready to start for England," said Maria. "There's that strange noise again! This old house is full of noises. We'll plan out how to kill Miss Rosse and Gretchen and carry out the plan a month hence. Meanwhile, we'll keep a closer watch on 'em than ever. We'll prevent any signals or escape, and lull Miss's suspicions if she should possibly have any."

Jarvis arose quietly and began stealthily to creep along the wall towards the hall door,

"I'm agreeable to the plan," said Mrs. Jarvis," with an air of relief. "The thing is settled—all but details. Them we can arrange at our leisure. Jarvis, what are you up to?"

Jarvis suddenly pulled open the door.

Cecil Rosse and old Gretchen were seen, both pale as ghosts, and wild with terror, cowering on the threshold.

With one shrill scream, Cecil turned to run down the stone passage. In an instant Jarvis had seized her by her rippling hair and dragged her brutally into the kitchen.

Old Gretchen followed, wringing her hands, and begging that her mistress's life might be spared.

"Shut up!" commanded Jarvis. "Now, you women, we're found out. The gal has listened to everything. She's got to die, sure enough, and the old creetur with her. Lock the doors, and we'll settle this here business!"

CHAPTER III.

IMPRISONMENT.

The excited order of Jarvis was promptly obeyed. Mrs. Jarvis ran and secured the great outer door of the kitchen with bolts and bars, while Maria, the Portuguese woman, locked the door leading into the hall, and transferred the massive key to her pocket.

It was a weird and strange scene.

The black stone floor, the kneeling figure of Cecil Rosse, her young face upturned, her dusk eyes wild and scared, yet withal strangely brave, the brawny, red hand of her enemy clutching the rippling waves of her red-brown hair; behind her old Gretchen, moaning and wringing her hands; on either side the two sinister women, awaiting their master's orders, and over the whole group the strong glare of the light that flamed from the blazing logs on the wide hearth.

Outside, the wintry gusts of wind raved and roared. A whirling eddy of snow came in under the great door. In the chimney the winds held high revel, whistling and screaming like unloosed demons. It seemed as if nature herself were in

sympathy on this night with deeds of violence and crime.

In his excitement, Jarvis had dragged his young victim to the floor. Now that the doors were fast and his excitement began to cool, he loosened his hold upon her and retreated a few paces, pausing to regard her with mingled fury and exultation.

"There's an old sayin' as list'ners never hear no good of themselves," he exclaimed, "and you've found it out, Miss!"

Miss Rosse staggered to her feet and sank down into the nearest chair.

"I'd have you know as Miss Cecil wouldn't have listened, not even to such as you, a-plotting her death, if I hadn't suspected something and fetched her down!" cried Gretchen, indignantly.

"*You* suspected something!" exclaimed Mrs. Jarvis, with a sneer. "*You!*"

"Oh, I'm an old cow," cried Gretchen, "and stupid, and all that, as you say, I suppose, or I'd have made my young mistress run away this very night instead of bringing her down here to be caught like a bird in the snare. Oh, Miss Cecil, forgive me—it's all my fault!"

"Hush, Gretchen," said Cecil, softly and affectionately. "Do not blame yourself!"

"It was my man's sharpness that caught you," said Mrs. Jarvis. "Lor', Jarvis," and she turned to him admiringly, "how keen you are. To think you detected them a-list'ning when Maria and me couldn't hear anything. You're like them bloodhounds, you are."

Jarvis appeared complimented. He stroked his stubby chin while he regarded his prisoners with keen and threatening eyes.

"You've heard what wasn't intended for your ears, Miss," he said, after a pause, "but we won't have to explain matters, so time's saved. You know now that you are a prisoner here?"

The girl bowed her head in assent.

"You know as you a'n't at no Greycourt, nor in Yorkshire?"

"Where am I, then?" asked Cecil, who had attained to a marvelous calmness, although her pulses beat fierce and fast. "Am I in England?"

"No, you're not. I shall not tell you where you are!"

"Does Lady Trevor own this house?" asked the girl.

"No, she don't, and she never saw it neither!" affirmed Jarvis.

"Does Lady Trevor know that I am here?" inquired Cecil, trying to understand her terrible situation.

"No, she don't. We don't know no Lady Trevor. We never saw her. We're working for another party, we are!"

Cecil's little hands clasped each other in an uncontrollable agitation.

"And that party is secretly my enemy?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"You've hit it, Miss!"

"But there must be some mistake—some awful mistake!" cried Cecil. "I am a stranger in Eng-

land. I have no enemies. I never harmed a person in my life. Who could wish to kill me? It is monstrous—incredible! I will not believe it. Tell me that you were not speaking seriously, Mr. Jarvis. Tell me that it is all a dream or phantasy. Why, I have lived here months and found you all kind and respectful to me. Could you have been harboring thoughts of murder in your hearts all these months?"

She turned her wild and anguished eyes from one to another of the three faces of her enemies, and she shuddered at their hardness and savage cruelty.

"We won't argufy, Miss," said Jarvis. "The facts is as you know. You're in the way of some one as sent you here, and has paid liberal to have you kept here."

"And who is it wants me dead!" asked Cecil, her young voice having an unwonted sharpness, her young face thrust forward further into the flaring light. "Who is my enemy?"

"Some questions can't be answered, and that is one on 'em," answered Jarvis.

Cecil was silent for some minutes, seeming stupefied. The whole matter seemed to her unreal and utterly incredible. She could scarcely believe the assertions of Jarvis. Whom had she ever harmed or wronged? Why should any one ever wish her dead? The more she thought upon the matter the more it seemed to her that she had been mistaken for some one else.

Presently she urged this conviction upon Jarvis, but he shook his head, declaring with an oath that he had made no mistake.

"THEY'VE OUTWITTED US!"—*See Page* 64.

"It's you—Miss Cecil Rosse, of Germany—as I'm ordered to keep here, and no one else," he said.

"It was Lady Trevor's friend, or business agent, Mr. Pulford, that put me on board the yacht," said Cecil, reflectively. "Is it he who seeks my death?"

"Mistaken again. You can't pump me, Miss, of things I don't wish to tell," declared Jarvis. "There's folks as have kep' their eyes on you longer'n you'll ever know of—folks as hate you and want you dead. They pays liberal, and folks as pays liberal always get their will. Your embroidery work has all been a blind, as has passed away your winter, and so have served its purpose. You've come to Black Rock, but you'll never leave it alive."

Old Gretchen renewed her expressions of grief, moaning loudly, and wringing her hands in despair.

Cecil forgot her own peril in pity for her servant.

"At least, Gretchen is in no one's way," she exclaimed. "No one demands her life. Do what you will with me, since I am helpless in your hands, but let her go."

"To warn the police, eh? You must think me a simple," sneered Jarvis. "She thinks such an uncommon lot of you, Miss, as makes me wish to send her along of you to the other world. The fate of one of you is to be the fate of the other."

"I won't accept my freedom unless Miss Cecil can be free too," cried the old peasant woman. "I am old and ignorant. I deserve to die for advising my young mistress to leave London. She owes all this trouble to me. Kill me, Mr. Jarvis, and let her go free. She is so young, so good, so—"

"And she'll die if you can be saved," cried Jarvis, again sneering. "I knows my business. You think so much of each other you shall die together. I sha'n't spare neither of you."

"That's the talk," said Mrs. Jarvis, approvingly. "You've wasted too much time in palavering, Jarvis. The gal has found out the whole thing. She ought to die this very night!"

"Yes, both ought to die to-night!" declared Jarvis.

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" moaned Gretchen, sinking upon her knees, her gray hair becoming unloosed and falling to her shoulders, scant, short and witch-like in its effect. "Spare my poor young mistress, who never hurt a living creature! In the name of the great God, who will one day judge you, if you commit this awful crime, do not harm her!"

Jarvis and his wife laughed brutally.

"Hush, Gretchen!" said her young mistress, sweetly and softly, in a low, calm voice, her face looking as might look the face of an angel. "Let us pray to God, and not to people like these. God has not abandoned us!"

Again Jarvis and his wife laughed coarsely.

"Prayers won't help you none!" said the latter. "But if they'd be any comfort to you, be at 'em quick. Your time's 'bout up!"

Old Gretchen covered her face with her apron and moaned and sobbed in her despair.

But Cecil's fearless eyes, dusky as night itself, with a golden glimmer in their depths like a yellow star, remained calm and unflinching. Something in that steadfast gaze made the ruffian Jarvis

strangely uncomfortable. Something in that pale, calm face, so tender, so sweet, so undismayed, affrighted him.

"You'd better be at your work, Jarvis," said his wife, catching the infection of his embarrassment and endeavoring to conquer it. "Now is your time. You're not going to turn faint-hearted, eh?"

Jarvis moved mechanically to the wide hearth and picked up one of the big brass andirons. As he moved heavily, with this weapon, towards Miss Rosse, the Portuguese woman hastily interposed.

She had been silent for some minutes, but intensely watchful. She was very superstitious, and she had watched the progress of the scene with gloomy eyes. Now, as Jarvis, with his devilish intent expressed in looks and attitude, moved toward Cecil, the Portuguese woman sprang forward and caught his arm, crying out:

"Stop! You shall not kill her to-night! I will not have her killed to-night!"

Jarvis turned upon his confederate in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Are you going back on your bargain?"

"No. I'm with you, heart and soul, and you know it. The gal's death is as necessary to me as to you. If she lives, I shall have to stay here in this awful solitude years, perhaps, when I yearn for my own country and independence and the marriage on which I've set my heart. I want her to die—"

"Then why do you interfere with me when I'm about to put her out of the way?"

"Because," said Maria, slowly, "we've got to stay

here weeks yet. The snow lies many feet deep in the mountain passes. We are storm-bound and cannot get away under a month. Yet I will not stop a night here after they are dead. They'd ha'nt us, sure as fate. They'd come back to us in the dark nights and frighten us out of our senses!"

"Coward!" sneered Jarvis.

"Call me coward, if you will, but let 'em live until we are ready to quit this place," cried Maria. "We can destroy their lives the night before we leave Black Rock. And in the meantime we can keep them prisoners in the tower-chambers. They will be quite safe—as safe as if they were already dead."

The Portuguese woman had aroused the superstitious fears of Mrs. Jarvis, who hastily exclaimed:

"I agree with Maria, Jarvis. Let's act on her advice. Miss Rosse and Gretchen are already the same as dead. You can finish 'em off at any time."

Jarvis was not slow to yield to these combined entreaties. It was one thing to destroy a life secretly, and another to commit a murder in cold blood, with a pair of steadfast, haunting eyes fixed upon him.

"We'll wait," he said, dropping the andiron heavily to the stone floor. "There a'n't no hurry. They can't escape. They're as good as dead now, and we can put the finishing touch whenever we please. There a'n't a house as I knows on within fifty miles, and no one ever comes to Black Rock. They're as safe as if they was in their graves."

"Let us take them up to their rooms," suggested

Mrs. Jarvis. "I can't abear the look of them eyes. Light a candle, Maria."

The Portuguese woman obeyed.

Jarvis demanded the key and unlocked the door leading into the hall. Then seizing Miss Rosse by the arm in a fierce gripe, he hurried her out into the narrow stone passage. Old Gretchen followed voluntarily. She would have followed her young mistress to death rather than survive her. Mrs. Jarvis and Maria brought up the rear, the latter bearing the light.

The little procession wound through the long, dark, draughty halls. The gusts of wind more than once nearly extinguished the light. Little piles of snow lay near the door-ways, having whirled in under the doors, and lay on the stone stairs, having filtered in at the leaks and crevices in the old roof. A long wail or shriek of the storm, as it tore down the cavernous chimneys now and then, made Maria cross herself instinctively, with unconscious recollection of religious forms in which she had been reared, and muttered a prayer to be saved from wandering ghosts.

They mounted the second flight of stairs, which was rickety and seemed to rock in the storm, and arrived at the third story rooms of the quaint old tower.

Jarvis kicked open the door of the tapestry-room with one of his feet, and thrust in his prisoner. Gretchen sprang after her with a cry of mingled misery and relief. And the three savage-looking jailers halted upon the threshold, surveying them with cruel exultation.

"You can have these two rooms as before, Miss,' said Jarvis. "Only we'll keep the keys. Jes remember as you're a prisoner and conduct yoursel according. If you attempt to signal any boats a may pass up or down the coast, but which is mos unlikely at this season, with the March storms a raging, that signal 'll be the signal for your death Understand that! I ain't a patient man. I won' stand no nonsense!"

He withdrew the key to the outer side of the lock and abruptly closed the door and secured it. The operation was repeated upon the door of the second room and the three conspirators descended the stairs heavily, retreating to their own quarters in the lower part of the house, there to discuss the events of the evening and to plan their intended double crime.

As the sound of their lumbering footsteps died away upon the stone stairs, Cecil Rosse crossed the floor to one of the windows, pulled aside the thick damask curtain, and looked out again into the night, with its white, whirling gloom, its howling winds, and the roar of its angry, furious sea.

Old Gretchen looked about her drearily, at the little supper-table, the low chair before the hearth, and the big hearty fire of blazing logs.

"How everything is changed during the last hour!" the old peasant woman exclaimed with a groan. "Here's the table and the supper, just as we left it—it is we who are changed! Oh, Miss Cecil, I could almost think we'd been dreaming! Why should any one wish to kill you, whose whole

life has been a blessing to others? You were the light and glory of the Herr Pastor's life; the villagers of Zorlitz almost worshiped you for your care and kindness to them in sorrow and sickness; you are good and lovely—why should any one harm you? Who could wish to kill you?"

Cecil turned her face towards her old servant. There were bistre shadows under the lovely dusky eyes, a strange pallor upon the young cheeks and about the tender mouth, but the expression upon the beautiful countenance was brave, undismayed, and deeply thoughtful.

"Gretchen," said the girl, quietly, "I believe that there has been some mistake made in my identity—that I have been brought here in mistake for some other poor unfortunate—or that this plot against my life is a part of the mystery that has enshrouded my origin and surrounded me from the night when I, a child of three years, a mere baby, was brought to Zorlitz parsonage." Gretchen stared.

"There has been no mistake, Miss Cecil," she exclaimed, excitedly, after a brief thoughtfulness. "Did you not hear them say so—that they had been hired to destroy Miss Cecil Rosse, of Germany?"

"I think that there has been no mistake," declared Cecil, calmly. "The person who had me immured in this solitary place, in this wild northern climate, remote from all mankind, had knowledge of me personally and of my tastes and capabilities. That person knew of my bargain with Lady Trevor, and had prepared for me this moth-eaten tapestry on

which I have spent so many months of useless toil. It is clear, therefore, that my enemy is one who is connected with the mystery of my life."

"But who can it be?"

"You could identify the man who brought me to Zorlitz parsonage, Gretchen?"

"I could swear to him anywhere by the squint of his eyes, and the heavy mole on his left cheek, and by his general features," affirmed Gretchen.

"Have you seen any person who resembled him since we came to England? Was Mr. Pulford like him?"

"No, Miss Cecil. I have never seen his cruel face since that night. Mr. Pulford is as unlike him as one man can be unlike another."

"Lady Trevor cannot hate me," said Cecil, wearily and sorrowfully. "Lord Glenham loves her. Even if she knew that he had been kind to me and won my heart, she could not possibly care, since she holds his troth. He must love her or he would not marry her. She cannot be my enemy. She is a lady, gently-bred, refined and high principled, a true Christian lady, I believe, else Lord Glenham could not love her. I am sure that she is innocent of any knowledge of this horrible plot against me."

"I am sure of that too. She was very kind to us," said simple old Gretchen. "A bad, wicked woman could not smile and talk so kindly and sweetly as she did. Depend upon it, Miss Cecil, Lady Trevor is innocent of all wrong-doing in this matter."

"Then whom shall I suspect? Mr. Pulford?"

Gretchen shook her head. She preferred to think Miss Rosse's enemy some unknown person rather than one who had seemed kind to her.

"Depend upon it, Miss Cecil," she exclaimed, "your enemy is the man who brought you to Zoritz. He watched you go to Lady Trevor's house, and watched your drive to the yacht. And after Mr. Pulford had given his directions to the captain of the yacht, this unknown enemy of yours secretly conspired with the captain, and had you brought to this place. I am sure that this is the true explanation of the mystery."

"It may be so," replied her young mistress. "I do not know enough of the ways of wicked people to suggest a better explanation. We are in the hands of some cruel and remorseless foe, of whom these people below are but the tools to carry out their master's will. My enemy seeks your death as well as mine. Where are we, Gretchen, do you think? Where is this Black Rock?"

But Gretchen could not return an answer that appeared to border on probability.

"We are many days sail from London," said Cecil. "The story that we had been driven from our course by bad weather was but a false pretence of the treacherous captain. The bleak, wild scenery, the driving storms, deep snows, and utter dreariness and coldness, show that we are in the far north, but whether in Norway, or Iceland, or Scotland, I cannot tell. One thing only I know—"

"And that is—"

"That we must make some effort to escape! To

remain here imprisoned, counting the days and nights of the single month of life these people allot us, will drive us mad. I'd rather fall from yonder precipice out there in the darkness, or freeze to death in the mountain-passes, than await here our coming doom !"

"And so would I. But how can we escape? We shall be closely watched and guarded. Our enemies may drug us into quiet passiveness. And though they decided to let us live a month longer, they may change their minds and kill us to-morrow. They will aim to destroy us when we are off our guard. Oh, Miss Cecil," cried the old woman, despairingly, "there is no escape for us! We are doomed !"

CHAPTER IV.

THE END DRAWS NEAR.

Old Gretchen flung herself upon a couch and raved and wept and sobbed in her agony of despair. But Cecil stood at her window, white and silent, with grave, incredulous eyes, and troubled, anxious mouth, intent upon the problem of escape.

To remain passively awaiting death at the hands of her enemies would be worse than to brave the most horrible fate in the attempt to escape. A month of such waiting would be an eternity to both the intended victims. And yet escape, in the present state of the weather, would be an impossibility.

"I must wait," Cecil said to herself. "I must be brave and calm and patient. God will not desert us in our extremity. I will trust Him, even unto the end."

Raising her anguished eyes, striving in vain to pierce the thick gloom of the wild night, Cecil breathed a prayer to Heaven for protection in this hour of need, and then, calmed and strengthened, she turned from the casement and approached her old servant.

"Come, Gretchen," she said, gently. "You must not give way like this. We are reprieved for a month. What may not happen during that period? Calm yourself. Rise, and let us talk the matter over."

Gretchen obeyed, wiping her face upon her apron, and striving to assume an appearance of self-command.

"Come, sit down by me near the fire," said her young mistress, drawing two chairs near together. "We must talk over our plans of escape. If we wish God to help us, we must help ourselves!"

Gretchen took the seat assigned her. And so, while the three wicked plotters laid their evil plans in the rude, stone-floored kitchen below, the two innocent victims of their hatred discussed in the high tower-chamber plans of evasion and self-defence.

"If we intend to get away alive from this house, we shall need all our strength," said Gretchen, after a long consultation, in which no decision had been arrived at. "You look like a spirit, Miss Cecil; your face is so white and your eyes burning. Eat your supper, dear, to please old Gretchen, and then you won't loose your strength."

She arose and brought her young mistress' plate and cup. Both food and drink were cold, but Cecil ate and drank, and her example was followed by her servant.

They sat up until late. Then, wearied and worn by their terrible experiences and emotions, they prepared to go to bed. Cecil resolved on a barricade against a surreptitious night-entrance by their

enemies, and assisted Gretchen to place certain massive pieces of furniture against the doors, in a manner to prevent intrusion.

"Our enemies, having determined to murder us, will execute their project at a time when we least expect harm," said Miss Rosse. "One thing is sure —they shall not enter our rooms when we are asleep."

Gretchen assisted her young mistress to undress, and retired to an inner closet, where her own bed had been placed, while Cecil said her prayers.

Neither of the pair kept long awake, but slumbered as peacefully as if their couches had been guarded by a host of armed friends.

Both awakened soon after daybreak. Gretchen made her toilet and emerged from her closet to find her young mistress fully dressed and shivering with cold, the fires having died down to ashes hours before.

"Let us remove the barricades, Gretchen," said Cecil, cheerfully, although her lips were blue and her teeth chattered.

"Do you think they intend to freeze us to death, Miss Cecil?" asked Gretchen, in a frightened whisper. "There's a mortal chill in the air that makes my very bones ache. You, who are so delicate, how will you endure this cold?"

Cecil smiled brightly, but made no other answer, as she helped remove the barricades they had placed the night before.

Old Gretchen brought a heavy shawl and threw it about Miss Rosse's shoulders, and began to walk

heavily to and fro, while Cecil took up her favorite station at one of the windows.

The snow had ceased falling. The sea was covered with restless white caps. The sun was hidden behind leaden-hued clouds. Such portions of Black Rock as had been heretofore visible from the tower windows were covered with a thick snow. No sail was on the sea, no sign of life upon the shore. A wilder and more desolate Northern scene could not have been imagined. All was hard and grim and terrible, with a fierce, chill wind sweeping over it, that would have blasted any green and living thing it might have found.

The key rattled in the door. Cecil turned about with a start. Old Gretchen halted in her walk, with an expression of alarm.

The door opened, and Mr. Jarvis entered, with an armful of logs, followed by his wife with a pan of blazing coals and a basket of pine cones and light, split wood. Maria kept guard at the door.

By the look of relief that came upon the faces of the prisoners Mrs. Jarvis read their recent fears.

"We didn't intend to freeze you to death," she said, "though that might be the easiest way out of the difficulty, only that we want to keep you alive until we get ready to leave the place ourselves."

"Will the yacht come for you?" asked Cecil, trying to speak carelessly.

"No, we shall travel by the mountain passes. There are three or four rough Highland ponies in the stable, and a good wagon, the same that brought

us here," replied Mrs. Jarvis, dumping her coals on the hearth, and arranging the wood upon them.

"And there's a couple of good blood-hounds in the kennels," remarked Mr. Jarvis, placing his back-log and fore-log in proper position. "I begs to remind you of them, Miss Rosse, in case you are planning to get the ponies and escape."

The fire was soon made, and the intruders withdrew, carefully locking the door behind them.

Gretchen swept up the hearth, cleared the table, looped back the window curtains and let in the gray and cheerless light of day.

By the time the chamber began to wear a warm and cosy look, Maria reappeared with a breakfast tray, Jarvis keeping watch at the door.

Miss Rosse ate her breakfast without fear of being poisoned, and Gretchen shared the meal.

When the tray had been removed and the prisoners were left to themselves, Cecil began to walk the floor for exercise.

"Shall you finish the embroidery to-day, Miss Cecil?" asked the old servant, doubtfully.

"No, Gretchen. The work was planned to keep me here a willing prisoner. I will not touch it again!"

"Then what will you do? You'll die if you remain shut up here, doing nothing."

"This house is very old," said Cecil, thoughtfully. "The roof leaks, the stairs are weak and rickety. It may have been built two or three hundred years."

"I am sure of it."

"It has seen troublesome days—times of war, per-

haps," continued Cecil. "I have read stories of ancient houses with secret staircases and hidden rooms. It might be, Gretchen, that this house contained some secret chamber."

"If it did, we should not be able to find it. Don't let your head be turned with romantic notions, Miss Cecil. We're bad enough off as we are!"

"We can at least investigate these walls, Gretchen," said her young mistress, with a show of reviving hope and courage. "Let us try it now. We can lose nothing. We may gain something."

Despite old Gretchen's remonstrances, Cecil began to tap the walls under the hanging tapestry with the fire-tongs. No hollow sound re-echoed from the damp, chill stones, covered over with wet and broken plaster. The old servant, continuing her remonstrances, presently joined in Cecil's task. The walls were thoroughly examined with a patience that deserved success, but only failure resulted.

"It is just as I thought!" muttered the old woman. "Who ever had such a wild notion, begging your pardon, Miss Cecil?"

"The notion does not seem wild to me," responded Miss Rosse, wearily. "I have read that it was the custom in very old times to build secret rooms in all great houses. Such hidden nooks were needed then, for there were bands of robbers bent on plunder roaming through Germany, there were feudal wars in Scotland and England, and—"

"But we may be in Norway, Miss Cecil. And if there should possibly be a secret room in this house,

it would not be in this tower. No such luck for us," grumbled old Gretchen.

It was now noon. The two desisted from their labors, and just in time, for Maria brought up a tray laden with dinner. The meal was prepared with the care Mrs. Jarvis had always displayed, and was tempting in quality, profuse in quantity, as usual. Maria's manner was respectful, as heretofore, and she laid the table with care, and spread out the viands to the best advantage, speaking only when addressed.

Cecil might have believed the experiences of the preceding night a dream, or the illusion of an unbalanced mind, but for the sinister face of Jarvis at the door, and the sight of the key in the outside of the lock.

The Portuguese woman retired, and Miss Rosse ate her dinner. The mountain-eyrie evidently contained a well-stocked larder. There was roast venison, besides broiled birds on toast, and mutton-cutlets with a peculiarly wild flavor. The game had been killed on the estate and preserved out of doors by freezing. There was coffee, too, and various other delicacies.

"They don't mean to starve us!" commented Gretchen. "As long as they don't attempt to freeze or starve us to death, Miss Cecil, I shan't utterly despair. If they'll give us a quick and painless death, it is all I can dare to hope for!"

After dinner, when Maria had removed the tray, and Jarvis had replenished the fire, Cecil and Gretchen extended their investigations to the walls

of the inner room. They spent the entire afternoon in their explorations, and it was not until the last inch of wall had been sounded and failure was decisive that poor young Cecil knew how much she had builded upon her strange fancy—how much she had expected to find some secret inner room.

They returned to the outer room and Cecil flung herself upon a couch. Maria brought up lights and supper, and Jarvis replenished the fire for the night.

When the young mistress and her servant were alone together, Cecil read aloud a few chapters in her little German Bible, and they talked awhile in low tones, and then retired to bed.

This day was a sample of many days that followed. The sun was hidden for days together. The sea was lashed to fury by the March winds. The snow remained on the ground a full fortnight, receiving constant additions, before it began to melt. April came, not the sunny, fitful, fickle April of more southern climes, but a stern, cold and windy month, with snows instead of rains, and without one sign of springing vegetation. It was simply a continuation of the long and terrible winter.

April gave place at last to May. The winds became milder. The snows yet lingered in the mountain-passes and on the mountain-tops, but the impatience of Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis and their confederate had increased to such an extent that they resolved to remain no longer at Black Rock, preferring to brave bad weather and bad roads rather than longer endure this Northern solitude.

Some deadly significance in the looks or manner of her jailers warned Cecil that the end was near.

Maria brought up a bountiful dinner one day, early in May, as usual. There was a sinister expression in the eyes of the Portuguese woman that struck a chill to Cecil's heart. The woman withdrew, descending to the kitchen.

"I've taken up her last dinner!" she exclaimed, "I'm bound to leave here immediately. The girl must die to-night."

"I agree with you, Maria," said Jarvis, with an oath. "I'm sick and tired of this blasted place. The girl and her servant must die to-night. The hour is come!"

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

The man Jarvis entered at once upon his preparations for the dread tragedy he and his confederates had so long contemplated. He went out to the stone stable and gave each of his ponies a liberal measure of oats, their fare during the winter having been principally hay, which he had cut and cured himself during the preceding autumn. He got out his stout old wagon, cleaned and dusted it, greased its wheels, and examined it in every part, testing its strength for the ordeal before it.

Then, returning to the fresh air, he surveyed the sky with a critical gaze.

"Looks as though there was more snow coming," he muttered. "But I'm sick and tired of Black Rock, and the women are set on going—we'll have to risk it. The ponies are in good condition. As we go south'ard, stands to reason we'll find better weather. It's May now, and the roads, so far as I can see, is tol'ble. The fever of going is in our blood, and nothing'll squench it but to go. Wish we had a yacht to go in. We'll make for a fishin'

village I know on, fifty miles down the coast, and hire a boat there to take us south'ard. I think we can safely begin the journey to-night, or rather in the morning before day-break."

He chewed the end of a straw leisurely while he walked up and down the stable-yard, with its small rick of hay and its stone-flagged pavement.

"We won't get rid of the young lady and her servant," he said to himself, "till towards morning. They'll be asleep then and onsuspecting. We'll open the door and creep in like mice, and one blow on each, and the whole thing'll be settled. We'll pitch the bodies over the precipice into the sea, and there's an end on 'em. I'll pack the wagon. It'll take all day to prepare for the journey."

He went into his out-door larder, and took therefrom some venison hams, a variety of game birds, a haunch of wild mutton, and two pork-hams, and carried them into the great kitchen.

The woods and fields of the estate of Black Rock were filled with game. The sheep and swine, of choicest breeds, that had once been so highly esteemed by their owner, now ran wild. Deer were plentiful, and birds abounded in every nook and covert. A variety of wild cattle was also numerous, and the inmates of Black Rock House had fared sumptuously throughout the long winter.

Jarvis laid down his stores upon the long, deal table, and called his wife's attention to them.

"Better get them over the fire at once," he said. "Have plenty of bread. Maria can help you, while I pack the wagon."

He carried out a couple of mattresses and laid them in the bottom of the covered vehicle. A pile of blankets followed, then two boxes filled with clothing and personal effects. A kettle was swung under the vehicle, also two buckets for water, and several bags of provender for the horses.

Jarvis then loaded his firearms and deposited them upon hooks high up against the sides of the wagon.

By the time these and other preparations had been completed night was falling. The man took a final survey of the sky for the night and entered the kitchen.

A great display of cooked edibles was spread out upon the table, and their savory smell filled the air. In addition to the boiled and roasted viands there was a huge venison pasty, a couple of savory pies, a great supply of buttered bread, carefully wrapped in linen cloths and placed in stone jars, some jars of Dundee marmalade and English jams and jellies, and finally, a keg of Scotch whiskey and a demijohn of brandy.

These final items appealed most strongly to Jarvis' sense of luxury.

The food was packed in hampers, with knives and dishes, and transported to the wagon. The liquors were carried thither also, and lovingly secured against disaster.

"And now we're ready," said Jarvis, returning to his confederates. "We want to dress warm. The weather is sure to be freezing cold."

"How about the dogs?" asked Mrs. Jarvis. "What shall you do with them?"

"I have tied them under the wagon," was the response. "We are all ready to start, except that I have yet to harness the ponies and put them to the wagon. That must be done the last thing before our final visit up-stairs."

A supper was prepared for the prisoners, and Maria, as usual, attended by Jarvis, carried it up to the tower chamber.

Miss Rosse was seated by the hearth when the Portuguese woman entered. The girl's swift, keen glance searched the dark and sinister visage. In spite of her stolidity, Maria could not conceal a certain nervousness and uneasiness that possessed her. She dropped her eyes, and her dark cheek flushed, and she moved about with unusual awkwardness, as she laid the table and spread upon it the dishes she had brought.

"Supper is served, Miss," she said at last, moving toward the door.

At the threshold she half-paused, and Cecil caught her final glance, which was dark and strange and terribly significant—a glance in which for one single instant the secret wickedness of the woman's soul, her awful purpose, was made visible. There was a deadly triumph in that look, something of pity, yet withal a stern relentlessness, an exulting avarice, a gloating, evil joy, such as Cecil had never seen before upon her features.

The girl shuddered and bent nearer the fire, shading her blanching face with one shaking hand.

Maria went out and secured the door, unconscious of the revelation in her final gaze, and returned with Jarvis to the kitchen.

For some moments Cecil sat motionless. At last she raised her head, and called softly, in a voice that was singularly calm:

"Gretchen!"

The old servant came from the opposite side of the room.

"What is it, Miss Cecil?" she asked, in alarm. "How white you look! Are you ill?"

"Did you see that woman's face when she went out?"

Gretchen replied wonderingly in the negative.

"It confirms our wildest suspicions of this noon. It was strange and terrible. Gretchen, we were right. Our enemies have exhausted their patience. They mean to kill us to-night."

"Then what are we to do? Has God forsaken us?" cried the old peasant woman. "Oh, Miss Cecil, must we die here like birds in a trap?"

She looked around her wildly, as if with some vague hope of escape, and then realizing their helplessness, old Gretchen sank down upon a sofa, covered her head with her apron, and sobbed aloud.

Cecil sat very quietly for some time, thinking deeply. Now that the hour of death seemed so near, a new courage dawned within the girl's soul. Her long captivity had told upon her; her young face was wan and thin; her eyes burning; her slender frame was more slender than ever, looking as if a gust of wind would blow it away; but the young

heart was brave and resolute, and terror had brought the energy of desperation rather than the torpor of despair.

"Do not give way like this, Gretchen," said the girl, quietly. "A few hours yet remain to us. They intend to creep in upon us while we sleep. At the worst we will sell our lives dearly. Let us eat our supper, and then I will tell you of a plan I have."

Gretchen complied. They ate their supper. After Maria had removed the tray as usual and departed, Miss Rosse paced the floor with slow and troubled step and thoughtful face. Presently she went to one of the windows and looked out.

The night was chilly with a pale gloom upon shore and sea. The roar of the waves as they beat upon the rocks filled the air. The wind was blowing fresh from the west, damp and chill, with a salty flavor. The descent from the third story of the tower was so far as to render Cecil giddy as she looked down.

"We must lower ourselves to the ground, Gretchen," she said, drawing in her head. "We can manufacture a rope—"

"But if we get down they will hunt us with the dogs!"

"Let us do what we can and trust the rest to Providence. I'd rather die down there in the open air than up here in a prison. We have no time to lose. Come, Gretchen!"

The girl hurried into the bedroom and brought forth a quantity of bed-clothing. Sheets and blankets were cut into long strips and braided into

a firm rope. Gretchen brought her own bedclothes, but still the rope was far too short for its intended purpose. Cecil climbed upon her high sewing-chair and tore down the tapestry from the walls, filling the room with dust. Selecting the strongest portions of the hangings, she succeeded in forming a rope long enough for her requirements. Knotting this at intervals, she secured one end to the massive, high, four-post bedstead in the inner room, and lowered the other end out of one of the bedroom windows to the rock beneath.

"We can never go down such a ladder," cried Gretchen. "We should miss our hold and fall to the rocks below. Or we should be dashed against the wall of the tower. "Oh, Miss Cecil, your plan is not practicable!"

"At any rate I shall try it!" returned her young mistress. "I'd rather be dashed to pieces on the rocks than wait here to be murdered. It is growing late. How long it has taken us to make our rope! We have no time to lose. Let us dress at once. Put on the thickest clothes you have, Gretchen."

She hastened to set the example. Her worn, black cashmere gown was exchanged for a walking-suit of Scotch wincey, one of her latest purchases in London. She put on high, thick walking boots, and drew over them a pair of Gretchen's thick-knitted yarn stockings. A knitted jacket enveloped her form, and over this she drew on her long, thick-wadded cloak, the close sleeves of which protected her wrists. A muffler was added about her neck, and heavy gloves covered her hands. Finally,

she put on her close-fitting fur cap and wound a second muffler about her waist, in readiness to tie over her ears when its protection should be required.

"I am ready!" she announced, after ascertaining that her pocket-book, with its contents, was safely bestowed upon her person. "And you, Gretchen?"

"I am ready, too," replied the old woman, who had equipped herself similarly with mufflers, cloak, and two pairs of heavy knitted stockings. "But ready for what? Where are we going, Miss Cecil?"

The young mistress could not answer. She looked at her watch. The hour was close upon midnight. She fastened open the casement and went into the outer room and extinguished the light of the two candles. Then she returned to the bedchamber, locking the door of communication between the two rooms.

The fire was burning low in the bedroom hearth. Cecil, with a sudden inspiration, knelt down before it, and looked up into the cavernous chimney.

"If we could only hide up there while they, thinking us escaped by the window, look for us on the rocks below!" she thought. "Is there no chance? No possibility?"

She scanned the yawning opening for some sign of a friendly ledge, but none appeared. She seized the long iron shovel and plunged it against the sides of the chimney, raking down a cloud of dust and soot.

Suddenly her shovel struck a slight projection

that gave back a ringing, metallic sound. She beat the chimney-side with several resounding knocks, and a minute later one side of the chimney, comprising a section of brickwork some two feet wide by four deep, swung inward like a door upon hinges, revealing a closet behind it.

The fire-light shone into this recess, and Cecil's exploring gaze discovered that it was some six feet square and as high as the bedchamber. It had evidently been built with the chimney as a repository of valuables, rather than as a hiding-place for human beings.

Cecil's cry brought Gretchen to her side.

"See, Gretchen," exclaimed the young girl, excitedly. "We can hide in there while our enemies think us escaped by the ladder and search for us below."

"But it's too hot. We shall roast alive!"

Cecil gathered up her skirts and stepped quickly over the corner of the burning logs and entered the recess. It was warm within when she had nearly closed the door, but the heat was not in tolerable. The air had already been changed, and Cecil believed that it would be possible for two persons to remain there for several minutes without danger of suffocation.

She saw that the brick work had been built against and secured with rods and rivets to a massive iron door. The intricacies of the spring lock she could not solve.

"We shall have to leave the door open a minute crack," she said, "but that will not be detected.

We must be very careful not to close the door, Gretchen, remember. Our lives depend upon our caution in that respect."

She emerged from the recess, and Gretchen took her place.

"When we hear our enemies at the door, we will hide in the chimney-closet," said Cecil, extinguishing the lights. "We have nothing now to do but to wait."

They listened breathlessly for the sound of stealthy steps upon the stairs.

Meanwhile the conspirators had finished their preparations, clothed themselves in their thickest garments in readiness for flight, and were sitting about the kitchen fire, gathering up their evil courage for the work they had planned.

They had all been drinking heavily, to drown any possible qualm of conscience, and to prepare themselves for their wicked task. Jarvis now sat stupidly before the hearth, while Maria dozed in her chair, and Mrs. Jarvis watched the hands of her old silver watch and brooded gloomily. Even she caught a nap or two, a little later, but at last she started broad awake and sprang up, shaking her husband heavily by the shoulder.

"It's past three!" she exclaimed. "It's time we were moving!"

Jarvis aroused himself, rubbed his eyes, and arose from his chair. Lighting a lantern that stood upon the high wooden dresser, he went out to the stable, fed his dogs and ponies, and harnessed the latter to the heavy, loaded wagon. It was half-past

three when he had completed these final arrangements, and led the ponies out into the stable-yard, opening wide the double gates.

"We can get off now at a moment's notice," he muttered. "Now for the last job!"

He looked up at the sky. The faint lurid streaks of dawn were already apparent through the midst of the gloom.

"In an hour it will be light," he said to himself. "And in an hour we'll be on our way to the south'ard."

He secured the ponies to the gate-post by a light strap, and then returned to the kitchen. The women were wide awake and astir. They had prepared a hot breakfast, and the three sat down to eat it.

When they had finished they regarded each other with deadly significance.

"The time is come," said the man, hoarsely. "Give me another quartern of whiskey, old woman, to brace me up, and then come on."

He drank his portion of whiskey, the women drank also, and then taking up the lantern and a couple of bludgeons that had been prepared for the occasion, the sinister trio crept through the long halls and up the stairs to the lonely tower-chambers.

The prisoners had watched hour after hour. Gretchen, in spite of her anxiety, had dozed a little in the early morning, but Cecil had remained near the door, listening until it seemed as if all her senses had concentrated themselves in that of hearing. Every creak of the ancient timbers, every movement of a rat in the thick walls, startled her. No

thought of sleep entered her mind. Her dusk eyes stared straight before her, hour after hour, all the long night through.

At last, as she saw the first faint signs of dawn in the sky through the open window, a lurid streak here and there traversing the inky gloom, and realized that the morning was at hand, she drew a long sigh of exquisite relief.

"I must have been mistaken," she thought. "I have suffered imprisonment so long, and have so dreaded the death I saw impending, that I thought Maria's strange looks foreboded the end to-night. We have a further respite. Thank God!"

She raised her eyes upward in joyful gratitude.

"But, hark! What was that? A creaking sound upon the stairs—a stealthy tread upon the floor of the corridor without—the sound of suppressed breathing at the door!

The girl rose to her feet, white as death, in an agony of fear and suspense. Her gaze met that of Gretchen, who had started broad awake, and who had risen and now stood, with wild eyes and preternaturally calm visage, prepared for the worst.

The intruders passed on to the door of the sitting-room. The girl's sharpened hearing caught the sound of a key grating in the lock.

She tried to whisper to her old servant, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. Raising her hand in a gesture of command, she raised her skirts, sprang over the end of the burning fire, and hid herself in the chimney recess she had so strangely discovered.

Old Gretchen followed after her like her shadow.

The two crouched in the hot blackness, and waited, holding their breaths.

Presently they heard the door of communication between the two rooms softly tried. Cecil had locked it, and it resisted the efforts of Jarvis to open it. Then followed a silence, after which the prisoners heard a key rattling in the lock of the bedroom door.

They pushed the door of their recess nearly shut.

The next moment the bedroom door was opened and the three intruders, bludgeons in hand, crept toward the high curtained bed.

It seemed scarcely a second afterward when a hoarse, wild yell rang through the room.

"She's gone!" shouted Jarvis. "The bed has not been slept in!"

"See the window!" cried Maria, shrilly. "A ladder, as I live!"

"They've fled!" screamed Mrs. Jarvis. "They've outwitted us! They've had a night's start of us!"

The three made a simultaneous rush for Gretchen's closet, and then for the open window. The ladder appeared to tell its own story. They hastily drew up a section of it, noted its length and strength, and the knots at frequent intervals, and then, with oaths and maledictions, fled precipitately from the room in their mad haste to search the rocks below.

Mrs. Jarvis lingered behind the others to make a hasty search of the room, and then followed, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"Now is our time!" whispered Cecil.

They crept out of their narrow hiding-place, crossed the floor, and glided out at the door into the dark, damp hall. They flitted down the stairs, threaded the corridors, and gained the deserted kitchen.

The outer door stood wide open; the wind streamed in, scattering the fire and ashes in a cloud. They hurried out into the yard. Their jailers had run to the cliffward side of the dwelling, and were examining the rocks in a panic.

Cecil's quick eyes caught sight of the open gates of the stable-yard and the waiting horses and vehicle. With the rapidity of inspiration, she ran into the yard, unloosed the hitching-strap, and climbed into the vehicle!

Gretchen followed her, sinking down upon the seat, gasping and panting for breath.

Cecil's dusk eyes blazed. She caught up the rude whip, touched up the spirited ponies, and drove boldly out of the stable-yard, taking instinctively to the grass-grown road. She knew the road well for a mile or more, and pushed her ponies forward at their best speed.

The old wagon had half-way descended the Black Rock hill when Mrs Jarvis, returning with a late sense of caution to secure the house, and keep watch there over her effects, discovered the absence of the vehicle from the yard, and beheld it in full flight.

Her frantic shrieks brought her husband and Maria to her aid, and the three, in a frenzy of madness, dashed down the hill in wild pursuit.

CHAPTER VI.

A DECLARATION OF BETROTHAL.

Upon the northern coast of Scotland the month of May had come in with ice and snow and sleet, and with the chill of prolonged winter. But in the south of England the fruit-trees were in full bloom, the birds in full song, and the fields and pastures had put on their brightest verdure. Farmers were at work, flowers were blooming, and nature was in her softest, sweetest and most tender mood. The fashionable world had come to London for the season. Parliament was in full session. Lord St. Leonards, who was a power in the House, was at his town residence in Park Lane. Lord Glenham and his mother were in their own house in the same street, and Lady Trevor was domiciled in her establishment in South Audley street.

The handsome widow sat alone in her morning-room. Her brunette face, made up in the highest style of art with roseate bloom and pearl-powders, kohl, and the various other cosmetics known to a woman of the world who desires to repair the ravages of time and fashionable dissipation, showed

no trace of secret care or anxiety. No remorse from the tortures she had inflicted upon Cecil Rosse troubled her rest. She looked supremely at her ease, as she busied herself with writing responses to a handful of cards and letters of invitation, and even hummed a careless tune as her jeweled hand glided over her pink, perfumed sheets of paper, upon which glittered her gilded crest and monogram.

She was thus engaged when the old Marquis of St. Leonards was announced.

She arose as he entered her presence, and rushed towards him with an affectation of joy—a gushing manner that might have belonged to a school-girl.

"I am so glad to see you, grandpapa!" she exclaimed. "So delighted! I have looked for you every day since my arrival last week! I had almost ceased to expect you!"

She offered him her mouth, but the old lord pretended not to understand her. He saw through her affectation of affection, and gave her his hand gravely, responding:

"I received your note announcing your return to town for the season, Edith. I have been very busy with this railway bill in the House, and have not found it convenient to call before."

"I am glad to see you at any time and always, dear grandpapa! How is your tiresome gout this spring? When I saw you at St. Leonards, you were such a martyr."

"I am quite well, thank you, Edith. I have been in town with Glenham nearly all winter."

"Yes, I know," replied Lady Trevor, seating her-

self on a sofa beside the leonine old lord, and looking at him with a gaze meant to be reverential and affectionate. "You were trying to find that poor sewing-girl, Miss Rosse. Have you found her yet, grandpapa?"

"We have not!" was the brief response.

"I haven't seen Gordon since my return to town," said Lady Trevor, plaintively. "I wonder if he intends to cut his old friends. Where is he?"

"Working up a clew upon the Continent," replied the marquis. "This clew will turn out like all the others, I fear," and he sighed. "Miss Rosse has been missing nearly seven months! The detectives have given up the case, and I am inclined to despair."

"What a strange mystery it is!" said Lady Trevor, meditatively. "My opinion is, that the girl is dead!"

"Then where is her servant?" asked Lord St. Leonards, sharply. "How can two persons die without leaving any trace of their decease? They conldn't have buried themselves. I don't believe they are dead. I believe there is foul play somewhere, and just so surely as I live I'll ferret out the truth and bring whoever is concerned in it—whoever has tried to injure Miss Rosse—to a bitter and terrible punishment."

The widow trembled, but her face remained placid and sympathetic.

"How deeply you are interested in the fate of that girl whom you saw but twice," she exclaimed. "I liked her, too, but I am sure that she is dead!"

"You liked her?" repeated the marquis, bitterly. "*You!* If it hadn't been for your treachery to me in trying to get her out of my way she might have been safe and well in my house to-day. If she is dead, her death lies at your door. You knew that I had determined to adopt her as my grandchild, if she would consent, and you conceived the idea of sending her off to Greycourt. I blame you, Edith, for much of which has happened."

Lady Trevor put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I owe much of the sorrow of my life—all its terrible loneliness—to your treachery," continued the old lord, knitting his heavy white brows, his frosty blue eyes gazing sternly upon her. "If you had but brought me my little grandchild after her mother's death, as my daughter-in-law implored you to do, I should to-day have had Alba with me. Sometimes I doubt you terribly, Edith, in spite of all your fair protestations. Sometimes the idea will haunt me for nights together, keeping me wakeful and agonized, that you killed that innocent baby—that you murdered her—to inherit her wealth!"

"Grandfather!"

The marquis shook off her hands, which she had put out to him, and moved farther from her.

"I cannot bear that name from your lips, Edith," he exclaimed. "I was awake all last night, thinking of Miss Rosse first, then of you, and my dead little Alba. All my doubts of you returned in full force. I remembered that your husband was one of the worst scoundrels in England. I remembered—but I have not come here to rehearse the old

story, or to accuse you. I do not wish to know if you are guilty. In the day when the secrets of all hearts are made known, the story of little Alba's death will be made clear!"

"You wrong me most cruelly. Will you never forget your doubts of me, or do me justice?" cried Lady Trevor, apparently overcome with grief. "I am innocent of Alba's death. I could never consent to a murder. If Sir Albert had plotted to destroy the child I would have saved her. I am sorry now that I did not bring her at once to you after her mother's death, but your agent saw her alive, and she is buried in your ancestral vaults. She is dead, grandfather, and, I repeat, I am innocent of her death. How can you accuse the daughter of your only son of an awful crime? I am of your blood. In spite of my faults I am not capable of a crime. I swear it. Come, grandfather, dismiss your doubts of me. Do me justice."

"We will dismiss the subject," declared the marquis, coldly. "I must not see you often, Edith. You arouse all the memories I desire buried. To return to Miss Rosse. I suppose that you have never heard from her since her disappearance?"

"Never. I expected to receive some apology from her for her breach of contract, but I have not done so."

"I see that that man Pulford is still in your employ, Edith. I came here especially to speak to him. The rumor is rife again that you are engaged to marry him."

"I beg that you will deny it, then. I am not

engaged to marry him!" said the widow, decidedly. "Do you think that I would marry my agent whom I regard as my servant?"

The marquis regarded his granddaughter keenly.

"I hope," continued Lady Trevor, with apparent indignation, "that I know too well what is due to my rank and family to make a second marriage that would be distasteful to you, grandpapa. Besides," and she affected to blush, "I hope that your old plans for me may be yet realized. You know my secret, that I love Lord Glenham. When his grief for Miss Rosse shall have worn away, and he realizes that she must be dead, perhaps your well-known wishes may have some effect upon him."

"Humph!" muttered the old marquis.

"I know that Lady Glenham is anxious to bring about the match," said the widow. "She has told me so often and often. She has never seen Miss Rosse and the glamour of the girl's beauty has never blinded her eyes to Miss Rosse's adventuress character. The countess desires more than anything else her son's marriage with me. That marriage will be brought about if there is anything in a mother's influence, or in a steadfast love like mine."

"Glenham can do as he pleases. I decline to use my influence," said Lord St. Leonards. "When I believed Miss Rosse an adventuress, I tried to save Glenham by a marriage with you. But now that I have seen Miss Rosse, and know her to be noble and pure, and more than worthy even of him, I should despise him if he were to marry you—even if he knew her to be dead! My doubts of you, which,

try as I will, I cannot conquer, confirm me in my opinion !"

"You are complimentary."

"I am truthful—and you are not always that, Edith."

The widow's hard, black eyes sparkled with rising anger.

"You insult me !" she exclaimed. "I am truthful—I despise a falsehood ! Do me justice, grandfather ! I am incapable of a lie !"

Before the old lord could make any response, Mr. Pulford entered the room.

His florid face was easy and smiling. He seemed thoroughly at home, and bowed pleasantly to the old marquis, who regarded him with savage dislike.

"We have been talking of you, Mr. Pulford," said his lordship, speaking with forced courtesy.

"I was telling Lady Trevor of rumors of her reported engagement of marriage to you, sir. May I ask you to contradict those reports ?"

Mr. Pulford glanced at the widow, who made him a gesture commanding assent.

"I am happy to say, my lord," said Mr. Pulford, easily, "that no contradiction is necessary. Edith, my dear, tell the marquis that the reports are all true—that you have planned a little surprise for him—and that I shall soon be his grand-son-in-law and your happy husband !"

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE MOVEMENT.

The effect of Mr. Pulford's bland and easy declaration of his betrothal to Lady Trevor, immediately after the widow's indignant denial and protestations to the contrary, had scarcely the effect he expected.

Lady Trevor went into violent hysterics.

Lord St. Leonards, after one moment's incredulous stare, flew into a rage, denouncing his granddaughter and Mr. Pulford together, declaring that he would not countenance any such marriage on the part of Lady Trevor, and that if she persisted in her engagement, he, the marquis, would never see her again.

When the furious old lord paused in his denunciations and threatenings, to take breath, his angry eyes turning from one to the other of the betrothed pair in a gaze that might have scorched and withered persons less hardened than those whom he addressed, Lady Trevor's hysteric demonstrations increased to such an extent as to indicate an utter loss of self-control. But Mr. Pulford stood calm

and unmoved, his face as impassive as that of a sphinx.

"You do not approve of the marriage, then, my lord?" he said, very quietly, taking advantage of the marquis' state of breathlessness.

"Approve?" cried the old lord, finding breath again with unexpected celerity, fairly snorting in his wrath at Pulford's audacity. "Approve? If Lady Trevor marries you, sir, I shall disown her! Not one penny of my property shall she ever see! Approve? Humph!"

Words were all too cold and meaningless to express his lordship's rage. His frosty old eyes glared. His mustached lips parted above his bristling teeth, and his breath came in snorting gasps. His lion-like temper was aroused. He considered the projected alliance as a disgrace to his name and house. He was enraged at Lady Trevor's lying and deceit. All his slumbering hatred of her, all his suspicions of her, which, in spite of his efforts, he could never really lull to sleep, conspired to inflame his passionate fury to the highest pitch.

"Calm yourself, my lord," said Mr. Pulford, coolly. "Really, you will throw yourself into an apoplexy if you give way to such unreasoning anger. Possibly you forget that I am a gentleman of birth and education—"

"I do not care for your birth and education!" cried the marquis. "It is enough for me that you were the bosom friend of Sir Albert Trevor, one of the worst scoundrels of his day. You aided and abetted him in his dissolute practices, although

your cooler blood and lesser fortune did not permit you to share in them. You constituted yourself chief adviser and business agent to his widow, and now you tell me that she has agreed to marry you. A few minutes before she declared herself incapable of falsehood and solemnly assured me that she was not engaged to marry you. It strikes me that, morally, you are well worthy of each other. If this marriage takes place, I beg to decline the honor of your wife's acquaintance, sir. Lady Trevor, if you have any further explanations to make to me, you can make them by letter!"

The marquis took up his hat and moved towards the door.

The widow, half frantic at the turn affairs had taken, made a gesture to the marquis to remain, while she looked imploringly at her hated suitor.

"Leave the room, Pulford!" she said, beseechingly, in a hurried under-tone. "You will ruin everything. Leave grandpapa to me!"

Mr. Pulford smiled sardonically, but made no movement to obey.

"One moment, my lord," he said, suavely, detaining the marquis at the very door. "Edith, my darling, can you not plead with grandpapa to forgive us and look kindly upon us? Tell him how you love me, dearest—"

Lady Trevor uttered a faint scream, covered her ears with her hands, and thrust her head into the depths of the sofa-pillow.

Lord St. Leonards, with a wild snort of rage too

deep for words, abruptly quitted the room and the house, violently slamming the doors behind him.

Mr. Pulford again smiled and began walking the floor with his hands in his pockets, whistling a tune.

The widow indulged in a renewed burst of hysterics. When her emotion had spent its force, she struggled to a sitting position, angry and sullen, with inflamed visage, and hard black eyes glittering with evil passions, as unlovely an object, perhaps as a lover's eyes ever rested upon.

Mr. Pulford, however, delighted in his power over her. He stopped short before her, exclaiming:

"If you are ready to be reasonable at last, my dear Edith, I should like from you some sort of explanation of this very singular scene!"

Lady Trevor angrily beat her slippered foot upon the carpet.

"I beg to know," continued Mr. Pulford, still blandly, but with an authoritative air that indicated his intention to be master, "why you denied to Lord St. Leonards our engagement of marriage."

"Because," cried Lady Trevor, finding voice at last, "because you and I agreed that our engagement should be secret. You have seen the effect of your announcement upon him. He will never leave me a penny."

"Your chances of inheriting any of his property had grown exceedingly slim, my dear Edith. He has avowed his intention of finding Miss Rosse and making her his heir."

"But he can't find her. And, not finding her, he might leave his unentailed property to me. I have counted upon inheriting it, now that she is out of the way!" cried the widow.

"His unentailed property is worth five thousand a year—an income worth scheming for," remarked Mr. Pulford, leisurely. "Under ordinary circumstances, I should be willing to sacrifice my own personal feelings to obtain it. But you have a fortune to which that is a mere bagatelle, so to speak, and I do not choose to sacrifice greater advantages to obtain the lesser. His favor and friendship would be worth more to us than his money. He is a great statesman, a power in the land, a favorite with the queen, a counselor to her majesty; in fact, one of the noblest and mightiest peers of Great Britain. His nod can open to me the best houses in England as his frown can close them to me. I am ambitious of becoming a man of society, of joining fashionable clubs, and of obtaining a title. All these things his favor would render easy to me—"

"Then why did you declare our engagement to him? Why did you provoke his anger and make such a scene?"

"Because I am tired of waiting in vain—because he would never look favorably upon your marriage to me. The advantages his favor would bring could never be mine because his favor is unattainable. I am letting the substance slip from my grasp while I chase after shadows. We have been engaged to each other about eight months. It was last September at Castle Cliff when I proposed to you, and you

promised to marry me in a month's time, and here it is May, and we are not married yet."

"We have waited on account of the marquis—"

"We will wait no longer, then. He is mortally offended, but I can live without his favor, as you and Sir Albert Trevor lived so many years."

"We waited also on account of that girl," said Lady Trevor, in a lower tone. "I would not marry while I had anything to fear from her."

"You have nothing whatever to fear from her now. If she isn't dead, she soon will be. I think you lack your usual wisdom in deferring our marriage for any such cause, Edith. If I become your husband, it is to my interest to guard your name and fortune from any marauder, is it not? We will not argue. You have put off our marriage upon excuses that appear to me unsound. I shall not listen to them longer. Our engagement shall no longer remain secret."

"Mr. Pulford—"

"The marriage shall take place within a month! By Heaven, madam, do you think I will submit to be cheated much longer out of my share in your wealth? I have submitted to your whims this past winter, and have allowed our marriage to be put off indefinitely. You have visited country-houses, have flirted with marriageable men, have schemed to win Lord Glenham—I've seen it all!—while I have come and gone as your business-agent, tolerated in good society because I am a gentleman and your friend, but only tolerated! Now we shall change all that. I intend to be master in this house, where now I am

a guest. I intend to enter society as your husband ; I intend to spend my share of your fortune ; to drive and ride with you in the park ; to be received as the equal of your lordly friends ; to sit at the foot of your table as the master and dispense its hospitalities ; to order your servants ; to loll in your drawing-rooms ; to live the life of a gentleman of leisure ! The day for your excuses and postponements is over ! We will be married on the first Wednesday in June !"

He delivered his ultimatum as if it had been a decree of fate.

Lady Trevor's face grew livid.

She had liked Pulford well enough as a servant ; as her betrothed husband she loathed, detested and hated him. She was ambitious ; the prospect of a marriage with him galled and humiliated her. She secretly loved Lord Glenham with all the fervor of her nature. She had by no means given up hope of winning the earl. Cecil Rosse forever removed from his path, why should not Lord Glenham consider his mother's wishes and contract a marriage with the granddaughter of Lord St. Leonards ? If Pulford persisted in his claims upon her, her love and ambition would be alike balked. She knew that he would be a hard master rather than a doting husband, and she said to herself passionately that she would rather die than become his wife.

And then all those dark and terrible schemes of deliverance from his power which she had considered when at Castle Cliff, in the first days of her betrothal to him, recurred to her with sinister force.

She dropped her gaze, her hard eyes emitting a baleful light that might have betrayed the nature of her thoughts, and she set her full lips together in a hard, tense line.

Mr. Pulford continued to regard her triumphantly.

"You know that this marriage is distasteful to me," said Lady Trevor, in a hard, cold voice, after a brief pause. "I do not love you—"

Mr. Pulford laughed sneeringly.

The widow flushed under her powder rouge.

"Can I not buy off your claims?" she asked, forcing herself to speak calmly. "I will give you five thousand pounds a year for life, and will procure your entrance into society on the terms you crave—"

Mr. Pulford laughed again.

"The terms I crave are simply to enter society as Lady Trevor's husband. Lady Edith Pulford—that doesn't sound badly, eh? Come, come, Edith, your reluctance to marry me is anything but flattering. I am a revengeful sort of person. I shall be apt to visit my displeasure upon you after our marriage, if you do not profess some liking for me. Do you want people to see that you are being forced into this marriage? They are likely to inquire how it happens that you are in my power? Leave but a slight clew to your secret loose and some one will seize upon it and unravel the whole mystery. You are safe only in your marriage with me."

Lady Trevor shuddered.

"I have appointed the marriage-day," continued Mr. Pulford, his face growing dark and terrible, his

eyes fixed upon her in a piercing gaze. "Is it your intention to submit to my decree, to proclaim our engagement, to prepare your trousseau, and have a grand marriage at St. George's, Hanover Square, with an entire column of glowing description in the court newspapers; or shall I blow your secret to the winds, produce the girl, and send you to a cell in Newgate prison? Take your choice, and let the matter be settled now for once and forever."

"I choose the marriage," said Lady Trevor, huskily.

"You choose wisely. By Jove! I might force the girl to marry me. No doubt she'd do it to escape her prison. I need not destroy myself, you see, to ruin you. But the matter is settled. We will go out to-day to order certain portions of your trousseau—such as require most time. I will go to Emmanuel's, and select diamonds for a bracelet, or other knick-knacks for you as my bridal gift. They will set the jewels and have them ready in time, and I'll pay the bill out of your money, my dear. We won't have any marriage settlements, I detest them. What is yours must belong unreservedly to me!"

Lady Trevor lifted her eyes and flashed a look of hatred upon her suitor.

"I will have marriage settlements," she exclaimed. "I will never give all my money to you and be left dependent upon you. The money is my own—"

"But how obtained?" asked Mr. Pulford, suavely. "By a horrible crime, for which, if I were to denounce you, you would be doomed to a felon's

cell. You are a criminal, amenable to the law, though you recline on a silken couch in your gilded drawing-room, with your hair frizzled, your cheeks rouged, and your form covered with silken robes. How quickly these frescoed walls would be exchanged for the narrow prison cell—those garments for prison stripes, that chevelure for a cropped head, if I were but to speak."

"You delight to torture me! Have everything your own way. When the day arrives I will be ready. Meantime, spare me your allusions to the past and your threatenings."

"It is a bargain. Learn to submit yourself to the inevitable with a good grace. Don't give the world food for scandal. If Lord St. Leonards were to get wind of your reluctance to marry me, he'd suspect the real truth. So make the best of the situation, my dear Edith. Order your trousseau, and remember that our engagement is no longer to be kept secret."

He approached and bent over her and kissed her forehead.

"I'm off to spread the news," he said, lightly, "to order your bracelet, and to procure the insertion of a little paragraph in the fashionable newspapers announcing the approaching marriage in High Life. 'The die is cast,' my dear Edith; there's no turning back now. Ta-ta, my love. I will do myself the honor of dining with you to-day."

He made a low bow, half in mockery, and departed from the room, humming a tune.

As the house-door closed behind him, the widow

sprang to her feet. Now the repressed passion of the past hour, no longer held in check by her terrors, leaped to her eyes and mouth, and revealed itself in their quick, impetuous movements, as she began to walk the floor.

"I hate him! I hate him!" she muttered. "The marriage shall never take place. I cannot prevent his announcing the engagement, but I will not marry him. Either he or I will die before the marriage-day. There is much to be done. I will make my preparations—but hardly such preparations as he desired! But, first of all, I must arrange to see Lord Glenham before he hears the report. He must come to me immediately upon his return from the Continent!"

She sat down at her writing-table and wrote a note to the young earl, requesting him to call upon her immediately upon his return to London. She sealed and addressed the missive, and dispatched it to Park Lane by a servant.

Then she went up-stairs to her own private rooms.

Her first act was to send away her French maid upon some trivial errand to a linen-draper's shop at a distance of a mile or more. Then she made a hasty toilet of the most unobtrusive description at her command. She brushed her hair low on her forehead, flattening it, and totally changing her appearance and expression. A short walking-costume of black silk, a square India shawl with black centre, her plainest bonnet, covered with a large, brown grenadine veil that was doubled over her face,

rendered her unlikely to be recognized should she chance to meet an acquaintance.

Her preparations completed, she took from her private desk, in her boudoir, a copy of a newspaper bearing date some months back.

Folding the newspaper so that the inner side came uppermost, she turned to a report of a murder trial, which in its day had attracted her attention. A man had poisoned his wife. He had procured the poison of a chemist, living in an obscure street, who was described in the testimony as old and infirm and avaricious; "a man who would do anything for money," and who had more than once rendered himself liable to the penalty of the law.

Lady Trevor found this chemist's testimony and cut out his address, destroying the remainder of the newspaper.

Putting the scrap in her pocket-book, she counted her money, of which she had over a hundred pounds in bank-notes and gold. Then she glided down stairs and out of the house, alone and on foot, to the surprise of the becalved and beplushed footman whose duty it was to wait upon the door.

She proceeded to Regent street, signaled an empty passing cab, and gave the address of the chemist, reading it from her scrap of newspaper.

An hour later, Lady Trevor, with a very pale face under her doubled veil, with her hard eyes glittering with sinister exultation, ascended her own steps and let herself in at the door with a latch-key.

She had returned home by a circuitous route to avoid pursuit, doubling upon her course like a hare,

had managed to conceal her name and identity from the chemist whom she had seen, and had reason to believe that no one knew her errand save herself, and the chemist, and that no one even suspected her private schemes.

Her pocket-book was empty, but she had gained possession of two vials, which appeared to her as priceless treasures.

"Now," she said to herself, as she glided up to her own rooms, "now, Mr. Horace Pulford, I am mistress of the situation. Before the appointed marriage-day comes around, either the bride or the bridegroom will be dead."

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

As the stout Highland ponies moved quickly out of the stable-yard at Black Rock, and the crisp, cold, salt air blew freshly upon her, old Gretchen revived instantly, the instinct of flight taking possession of her entire being. She leaned forward, clutching the side of the wagon, and looked backward with eager gaze.

"They're coming! they're coming!" she cried, wildly, her voice half-wailing. "They see us, Miss Cecil. They'll catch us."

Cecil set her lips together; her dusky eyes blazed like burning stars. She plied the whip vigorously, keeping a firm hold upon the reins. The ponies galloped down the hill at a reckless pace; the vehicle jolted against stones, tipped now and then into a rut or ditch threatening an overthrow, and dashed on madly, Cecil's steady hold never once relaxing, nor her stern courage faltering.

They gained the foot of the hill in safety, and plunged into a woodland-path, into a dense gloom made by thick overhanging trees.

Gretchen could no longer see the pursuers, but she kept up her keen lookout, muttering and groaning. The dogs under the wagon bayed and howled, excited by the wild speed of the horses. Cecil sat perfectly silent, the reins in one hand, the whip in the other, listening intently for the sounds of pursuers.

One mile—two miles—were gone over. Then Cecil drew a long sigh of relief.

"How many ponies did they have, Gretchen?" she asked, keeping the horses at a steady though not excessive speed.

"Four," gasped the old peasant woman.

"And there are only two to the wagon. The others must have been in the stable or the yard ready to mount or lead. They must be on our track."

"They will overtake us. With this heavy weight they will find it easy to capture us. What shall we do?"

"We might cut the traces, mount these ponies, and get away," responded Cecil. "But we are likely to repent it if we do that. We must keep to the wagon if possible. I have often seen firearms in the old kitchen. See if none of them have been put in the wagon. They would be high at the sides, out of harm's way."

The old woman groped about, and announced her discovery of firearms.

"I think I can use them, if necessary. I have seen the men at the Schutzen-fests firing their

rifles, and I know how the thing is done. Do you hear our pursuers ?"

"No, Miss Cecil," replied Gretchen, after intently listening.

Cecil again became silent. The ponies pressed on through the gloom and darkness, stumbling now and then, and jolting the wagon upon stones and in ruts.

In the course of an hour the faint gray dawn became apparent, even in the forest-wilds. The fugitives could see the wild desolation of the mountain-road, the various features of the weird and rugged scenery, and note the terrible loneliness that reigned supreme over the Northern Highlands. There were mountain-peaks on every side, all of them crowned with snow. The vegetation was, after passing the old park and forest of the Black Rock estate, sparse and stunted. No living creature crossed their path.

As the dawn deepened into daylight, and the cold became more perceptible, as they retreated from the sea, Gretchen began an examination of the interior of the wagon. She found the stores which the Jarvises had prepared with a view to their own needs and comfort, and carved slices from the roasted venison, brought out slices of bread and butter, a pot of fruit-jelly, and a jug of strong cold coffee.

"Here is something they intended for themselves," she remarked, depositing her treasures on the broad seat. "Let us eat breakfast, Miss Cecil. I will drive while you eat."

Cecil put her whip in its socket, and kept a firm hold upon the reins while she took up the sandwich Gretchen had made for her. She ate it while driving, not for an instant relaxing her vigilance or permitting her ponies to slacken speed to a walk.

"It is singular that they do not show themselves," said Cecil, when she had finished her meal. "Something must have happened!"

In truth, something had happened. Mr. Jarvis had intended to secure the two extra ponies to the rear-end of the wagon, and had left them loose in the stable. Mrs. Jarvis, on discovering the escape of the prisoners, had attempted to mount one of the ponies thus left, and had been thrown to the floor.

No injury had been done her, but the ponies were not secured, and in her haste she had left the stable-door open. After upsetting her, seeing the avenue of escape, both the ponies had gone careering into the stable yard, neighing for their late companions, had overthrown Maria, who happened in their way, and had then made a bold break for freedom.

With vivid recollections of a certain pasture from which they had been withdrawn a day or two before, they set off on a gallop, and regained the wide field, where for more than an hour they had indulged in the wildest antics, defying the efforts of Jarvis to capture them. At the end of that period they had again taken to flight, and to the old road by which the fugitives had fled.

Jarvis set out on foot, of course, to capture them, swearing till he was hoarse, and swelling with rage and fury that was little short of maniacal.

It was noon when he found them calmly grazing in the grass-grown highway. To belabor them with a club was his first act. Then he mounted and pushed onward in wild pursuit, relieving his pent-up emotions with imprecations "both loud and deep," and resolving to kill both Cecil and Gretchen at sight.

"There'll be no more foolish sentimentality," he growled. "No fears of being ha'nted, no dread of ghosts. A fortune like that girl a-slipping through my hands like this! I wonder I ain't raving crazy!"

Throughout that long morning Cecil kept the ponies at a steady jog. At noon, when they showed signs of flagging, she alighted, unhooked them from the wagon, and permitted them to graze in a little green dell by the roadside, where a mountain spring bubbled, and the young grass was thick.

An hour was given to this halt. The fugitives ate their dinner under the trees, and kept anxious watch in the direction they had come.

They put the ponies to the wagon again after due rest, and resumed their journey.

The road that during the morning had threaded a wide valley, now ran through a dangerous mountain-pass, so narrow in places that two wagons could not have passed each other.

The mountain rose steeply upon one side the path, upon the other a deep precipice yawned, and beyond that were other mountains. Even at mid-day the road was in deep shadow. It was crossed by frequent mountain torrents, spanned by insecure

old bridges that threatened to give way under the weight now brought to bear upon them.

In places the path was so narrow that a sheer of the horses to the outer side, of but a few feet, would have precipitated the fugitives into eternity. In other places a misstep would have been attended with the same fatal consequences.

Speed was out of the question. The ponies, sure-footed like all of their breed, and used to such precarious footing, plodded on steadily, while Cecil and Gretchen kept watch in front and rear, their nerves strung to their utmost tension.

For hours they marched in this terrible mountain pass, with strained vision and hearing, but the ponies never swerved from their course, and no pursuer came in sight.

At a late hour of the afternoon they came out into a wide valley which stretched for miles before them in a comparatively level plain. There were patches of snow in their way, but the road was improving, and Cecil again compelled the ponies to jog. It was twilight when she turned the vehicle aside into a scraggy grove of stunted pines, and came to a halt beside a mountain stream.

"We must stop for the night, Gretchen," she said. "The ponies are tired. And as for us, having been up all the last night, we must have rest."

Gretchen assented with many misgivings, and alighted from the wagon. The horses were unharnessed and tethered to trees, within easy reach of the noisy little stream. Cecil helped to rub them down.

"We must take good care of them. Our safety will depend upon them, Gretchen," she observed, gravely. Jarvis must be on our track. He will overtake us by to-morrow noon, even if he has been delayed, or if he is compelled to rest as often as we."

"Then what are we to do?"

"We shall have to resume our journey in the morning without the wagon. The ponies are gentle. We must ride them. We can take food enough in a bag for our wants and by to-morrow night this road must bring us to some shepherd's hut or some Highland hamlet!"

Gretchen brought out a variety of food, the best the wagon contained. After supper the old woman filled a bag, which she improvised from a table cloth found in the vehicle, with choice provisions, and placed it where it could be taken up at an instant's notice, should they be compelled to renew their flight in haste.

"One ought to watch while the other sleeps, Miss Cecil," said Gretchen. "I will watch—you look beat out. Your face is pale as death."

"But my heart is strong and my courage also," replied Cecil. "We have been free one whole day. I think God is surely befriending us. He will not suffer our enemies to overtake us and put us to death. But, we must watch as you say. You are older than I. Lie down in the wagon and sleep until midnight. Then I will waken you and take my turn at resting."

"But you are weaker than I," protested old

Gretchen. "You are delicately nurtured, while I am only a rough serving-woman. Let me sit up and watch while you sleep."

But Cecil shook her head with pretty imperiousness.

"You must do as I say, Gretchen," she said, affectionately. "Lie down now. I promise you I will take my turn."

Gretchen was forced to obey. She crept into the wagon and went to sleep, snoring heavily.

The young girl leaned against a tree, silent and watchful. She was well wrapped against the cold. The noisy torrent was very near. The mountain peaks, crowned with snow, shut in around her on every side like a bristling wall. The wind tore down the valley, coming through the mountain-passes, keen and chill. The shadows of the night deepened into blackness. Only two or three stars could be distinguished through the dense clouds. It was a strange vigil, one ever to be remembered.

Cecil's thoughts went back over her brief history. The mystery of her origin seemed to her to be connected with her imprisonment at Black Rock and the attempt of her jailers to destroy her life. What could that mystery be? Who were her unseen enemies? Who had bribed the Jarvises and the Portuguese woman to kill her?

She thought of Lord Glenham. His blond beauty, the rare charm of his manner, his nobleness and goodness, all were reviewed in that lonely silence and gloom. And the young face was turned up to the frowning sky, pale and sorrowful, yet full

of tenderness for the lover she believed forever lost to her ; and Cecil prayed for him and for Lady Trevor, whom she believed that he loved, that they might be happy, whatever should be her own fate.

She did not waken old Gretchen at midnight. But somewhere about one o'clock the old woman aroused herself and came forth, compelling Cecil to take her place. The girl did so, sleeping profoundly until daybreak.

Then she arose. They had breakfast. A feed of oats was given the horses, and they resumed their journey.

They had been gone three or four hours when Jarvis came riding up. He saw that they had halted for the night. He was hungry, and made an instant attack upon the stores they had left, consuming an inordinate amount of whiskey.

Securing extra stores of provisions, both food and drink, he pushed on after the fugitives in better spirits.

"They don't know the road ahead of them," he muttered. "This second day 'll tell on that girl. I shall overtake em at Devil's Gap, if not sooner. They haven't the slightest chance of escape !"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHEPHERD'S HUT.

In a long and wide valley, bright with spring verdure, and shut in by an undulating wall of snow-capped mountains, in the Northern Highlands of Scotland, stands a shepherd's hut. It is rudely built for summer occupation, and is covered with an overhanging thatched roof. It has a single door, a big chimney, but no window, unless a small square opening in the wall, covered with oiled paper, may be so termed.

The interior of the hut consists of one room. The only floor is of cobble-stones laid closely together. Two rude bunks attached to the wall, and one suspended above the other, serve as couches. In the blackened chimney hangs a crane from which swings a kettle. A small wooden cupboard serves as a repository for food, and is the only larder the hut contains.

The accommodations of the place, it will thus be seen, are of the rudest description. The hut is a mere shelter against storms—a place to sleep in—nothing more.

During the long Highland winters, the place was

left to the winds and snows. But when spring came, and the sun's increasing heat unlocked the ice-bound streams, and the grass sprang up anew, it was always occupied.

The valley belonged to a Scottish laird who lived many miles to the southward. In May of every year he sent his flocks to this lonely spot in charge of two shepherds, who watched them during the long summers, and drove them back to their winter quarters in the autumn.

These shepherds had just arrived. The flocks were already scattered through the valley, grazing on the tender young grass. The hour was twilight. The elder shepherd, a big, brawny fellow in a kilt, with legs upon which the muscles stood out like whipcords, lighted his pipe and went out to look after the young lambs, and to see that none of his flock had strayed into the mountain-passes.

His companion sat down at the door of the hut, just outside, and smoked a pipe also. He had not the other's muscle or intelligence. His face had a vacant look ; he was stupid and thick-headed , but there was a doggedness in his aspect that showed that when he had once made up his mind, whether right or wrong, he was not likely to change his opinions or purposes.

He was surveying the landscape with half-shut eyes, lazily puffing his pipe, when he beheld two Highland ponies coming down the valley, along the overgrown track that had many years before been a decently kept road.

The shepherd rubbed his eyes in amazement.

"WILL YOU GIVE US SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT?"—*See Page* 99.

He had been in this lonely valley summer after summer for years, but had never seen a face there other than that of his shepherd comrade. He rubbed his eyes, fancying himself the victim of an illusion.

The ponies came nearer and nearer. He presently detected that one was lame. His next discovery was that the riders of the ponies were women.

He sprang to his feet, opening his eyes and his mouth in his amazement. He held his pipe in his hand and stood like a statue for some minutes, while the ponies continued to advance, their speed quickening as they neared the hut.

The two horsewomen, as the reader surmises, were Cecil Rosse and Gretchen.

This was the evening of the second day of their flight from Black Rock. They had ridden hard all day, halting only an hour at noon to rest and feed their steeds. Gretchen's pony had slipped upon a rolling-stone in a wild mountain-pass during the afternoon and had fallen lame. This lameness had increased with every hour of subsequent travel. The roads had been bad and rough. In many places they had been undistinguishable, and the fugitives feared that they had lost their way and were wandering in a wilderness whence they should not be able to escape.

They had reached the Devil's Gap early in the afternoon. This was the place at which Jarvis had expected to overtake them. It was a narrow pass between two mountains. The road was barely six

feet in width, and was bordered on one side for half its distance by a deep gully, cut sharply and cleanly between the mountains by an ancient mountain torrent that had now dwindled to a brook.

The terrors of this pass kept the two fugitives dumb. They dismounted, afraid to trust to their ponies, and led the beasts for a distance of two miles, up a steep ascent and down again upon the opposite side. The Gap was gloomy beyond description, and even the ponies breathed more freely when it was left behind.

Towards nightfall, when wearied and anxious, they began to think of camping out for the night, they entered the valley we have described. Miss Rosse was the first to see the flocks of sheep. The sight of them kindled hope in the fugitives' breasts. Where domestic animals were, men were likely to be also. They hurried on, and soon afterward caught sight of the lonely hut.

"We are safe now, Miss Cecil!" cried the old serving woman, in a transport of joy. "I had begun to think that we were lost, and should perish in the cold to-night. But God has watched over us, and brought us to a safe refuge."

Gretchen's withered old face quivered in every feature. What her terrors had been were shown by the tremulous lips and tearful eyes at sight of the little valley hut.

They hurried forward, the steeds seeming to understand and share in their joy and relief.

The shepherd was still standing, open-mouthed, when they came up and drew rein at his door. Cecil

slipped from the back of her steed. He was quick to detect that she was a lady, and pulled off his cap, and saluted her by an awkward bow.

Gretchen, stiff in every limb, as was her young mistress, slid to the ground. The shepherd looked in the direction the fugitives had come in the expectation of seeing a male attendant. Not seeing one he fixed his bewildered gaze upon Miss Rosse.

She stood for a moment in perfect silence, her heart swelling, her agitation too great to allow her to speak.

She had thought herself lost. She had expected to camp out upon the ground all night. She had been haunted by fears of being overtaken by her enemies. But here was shelter. Here was surely help. She trembled so that she could scarcely stand, and leaned against her tired steed for support.

"Will you give us shelter for the night?" she asked, her low, sweet voice quivering. "We are very tired, having traveled all day."

"Ye can stop here, an' ye wull," responded the shepherd, glancing doubtfully over his shoulder at the rude interior of the hut. "But it's not a place for the like o' you, leddy."

"We shall be grateful for any shelter," replied Cecil, her brightening glance giving emphasis to her words.

"Coom in, then," was the prompt response. "The beasts 'll stand. They have na the strength to get away the night. Coom in, leddy."

He backed into the cabin. The fugitives followed

him. He flung a handful of pine cones and branches on the low fire, and a fragrant warmth and brightness filled the bare chamber.

Cecil and Gretchen sat down upon two wooden stools before the hearth, and held their hands to the delicious blaze.

The shepherd continued to regard the pair with wonder and surprise.

That one was mistress and the other servant was apparent to him. But what were they doing in this lonely region unattended! He began to be suspicious of them—the appearance of two women in that remote valley being utterly unprecedented.

Gretchen looked about her anxiously at the unplastered walls and unmitigated poverty of the place. She was unable to determine in her own mind what manner of people lived in such utter barrenness as this. Even the beasts at Zorlitz were better housed. She looked in vain for some signs of a woman's presence, and then fixed her regards upon her host, wondering of what nationality he was.

"Where are we?" she asked, in English, giving expression to her curiosity.

The shepherd stared; the folly of such a question made him suspect her sanity.

"Why, dinna ye see?" he asked. "Speer about ye, woman. Ye're in a shepherd's hut, that's where, ye are!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gretchen, comprehending him although his words had not the soft flow that

belongs to English tongues. "But where is it—this hut?"

The shepherd's surprise increased.

"Dinna ye know the Benmar valley?" he demanded.

"This is the Benmar valley, then?" said old Gretchen. "But what country is it? Are we in England, or Norway, or Sweden, or Iceland?"

The shepherd turned his puzzled gaze from the old peasant woman to Miss Rosse. The young lady was listening intently, with an eagerness that showed that she, too, awaited his reply with anxiety. Her dusky eyes were fixed upon his stolid, vacant face with a look that indicated a keen suspense.

"Lor' bless and save us!" thought the shepherd. "God be gude to us. These are two fules that don't know the country they be in!"

He made a prudent, partial retreat towards the door.

"Are you not going to answer?" demanded Gretchen, with increasing anxiety. "What country is this?"

"It's Scotland!" was the reply, as the host leaned against the inner door-post. "If ye're here, how happens ye didn't know that?"

"What part of Scotland is it?" asked Gretchen, paying no heed to his question.

"The Hielan's, of course. Do you see mountains like these in the Lowlan's? Are ye daft, woman? Sure, your mistress knows all this," and he turned his gaze upon Cecil.

The girl did not answer, but her looks and her silence were sufficient negative even to this dull-witted questioner.

"Our ignorance of our whereabouts must seem strange to you," said Cecil, noticing his looks of suspicion and general uneasiness. "We supposed that we were in Yorkshire, until very recently—Yorkshire in England. We were brought up the coast in a yacht and landed at a lonely old house where we have spent the winter."

"The servants in charge of the house were our enemies," exclaimed Gretchen. "They tried to kill us. We succeeded in making our escape yesterday morning before daybreak, and have ridden hard ever since. Our enemies are in pursuit of us. They mean to kill us both. They may arrive at any moment. Will you protect my young mistress and save her?" pleaded the old woman, earnestly.

The Highlander did not reply. In his own mind he deemed the "foreign woman" decidedly "uncanny." He regarded Cecil questioningly.

"My servant has given you an outline of the truth," said Cecil, with a calm and gentle dignity that ought to have convinced him of her perfect sanity. "I have a secret enemy who caused us both to be brought to this coast, when we supposed that we were on our way to Yorkshire. The servants at the house from which we have just escaped, were in the pay of that enemy. They sought to murder us in our beds, but we escaped. They are in pursuit; they are sure to arrive here to-night in search of us.

Will you not befriend and protect us? Surely, you would not deliver us up to be killed!"

The shepherd scratched his sandy head, and vainly wished for his comrade's return.

"It's a strange story, a vera strange story," he commented. "I dinna think I ever heerd the like afore. Murders and them things dinna belong to the Hielan's. Where was the house where you lived the winter?"

"It was called Black Rock—"

"Black Rock? The house of the lost Cathcairns! I ken the place. And you have been in that house?"

"We have spent the winter there."

The shepherd looked incredulous. He did not believe the assertion.

"The old house is ha'nted!" heexclaimed. "For fifty years no human being has been inside its doors. It is cursed. The blood of the murdered laird stains its flures. The twin brithers walk the halls and chambers, and spectral lights are seen in the windows. No one would sleep in Black Rock House for a king's throne. An' ye say ye've spent the winter there?"

"We have," declared Gretchen, stoutly.

"Ye must be mistaken. I dinna think it possible!" declared the shepherd, still incredulous.

"You have not answered me," said Gretchen. "You have not promised to protect us."

"No one shall kill ye, be sure o' that. Make yourselves comfortable, while I attend to the ponies," was the reply. "Are ye hungry?"

"We have food," answered the serving woman. "I will bring it in."

The bag had been removed from the pony's back and placed on the ground beside the door. Gretchen brought it in and the fugitives ate their supper, while their host made a pretence of looking after their steeds, and kept up an impatient watch for the return of his comrade.

The shepherd had no faith whatever in the story he had heard. He did not believe that a person existed who would dare spend a winter in Black Rock House. All his superstitions were against such credence. He did not understand his visitors. Consequently, being ignorant, he distrusted them.

He waited outside until Cecil came out and stood beside him, looking anxiously in the direction she had come.

"Ye look beat, leddy," he said, respectfully. "Ye'll better turn into one o' them bunks and go to sleep. Ye can fasten the door to suit yersel, and I'll watch outside. I expect my comrade back soon, and we'll let no harm happen ye."

Cecil raised her trusting eyes to his in gratitude. She put out her little white hand, which he seized and looked at as if it were a curiosity presented for his examination, and then dropped it as if it had burned him.

"May God reward you for your kindness to two friendless creatures!" said the girl, softly. "We will go to bed and to sleep, trusting in your promise to protect us. Good-night."

She went inside and closed the door.

"They can't help bein' fules," mused the host, touched by her beauty and sweetness into more consideration than he had before displayed. "She's a pretty fule, anyhow. To think she didn't know that this was Scotland! She must be clean daft!"

He resumed his smoking. In the course of an hour his comrade returned, and the story was rehearsed to him, with such additions and embellishments as the circumstances seemed to warrant.

"We'll hae to sleep outside," said the new-comer, whose name was Sandy. "From what you say, Wully, it seems that the two women are daft. If anybody is after 'em, it's because they need lookin' after. I dinna believe in murders in these times, nor in any canny person living at Black Rock House. Happen, it isn't safe to leave the two women-creatures in the hut. They may burn it afore mornin', but we'll take luck as it comes. I wad I hae a blanket to wrap mysel frae the cauld. Haeing nane except my plaidie, I maun keep awak' the night!"

This melancholy reflection occupied their attention for some minutes. Then they resumed their low discourse, keeping warm by walking to and fro and clapping their arms lustily.

Meanwhile, Cecil and Gretchen said their prayers and crept into the hard bunks and went to sleep. Their bones ached in every joint; they were thoroughly exhausted, and not even these anxieties could ward off slumber.

The shepherds watched outside, and talked, and found it hard work to keep awake. Both were doz-

ing about midnight when they were aroused by the sound of hoofs close at hand.

Starting up, they found themselves confronted by Jarvis.

The man had been drinking heavily throughout the day, but was now apparently sober. His anger against his escaped prisoners was all alive, however, under his plausible exterior, and his resolve to kill the two fugitives at the earliest practicable moment was stronger than ever.

"Good-evening, sirs," said Jarvis, politely, drawing rein, but not alighting. "Have you seen anything of two women traveling alone? By Heaven, there are the ponies now! The women are here!"

He sprang lightly to the ground, bristling with excitement.

"There are two women-creatures here," responded Sandy, with true Scotch caution," but if they be the ones ye seek we dinna ken."

"They are the same. I recognize the ponies. One of them is an old foreign servant-woman. The other is a girl—"

"A pretty bit lassie, with eyes like clouds with the sun shinin' through 'em," said "Wully."

"The same! I've been on their track these two days. Thank fortune I've found 'em. Have a drop, sir?"

He brought forth from an inner pocket of his heavy overcoat a long black bottle half filled with Scotch whiskey, and offered it to the two men. They accepted the courtesy, drinking copiously. Under the warmth of the fiery liquid, their caution

and reserve fled. Their distrust of the fugitives inspired them with zeal for the pursuer. Jarvis tossed down a draught when they had finished, and restored the bottle to its previous receptacle.

"About the women," he said. "You've given up the hut to them, I see, while you took the outside. That's kind of you. I suppose they are asleep? I'm anxious to get hold of 'em. I suppose they told a queer story, eh?"

"Ay, they did," said "Wully." "They talked like twa fules. I never heerd the like, mon."

"We concluded they was daft," said Sandy.

Jarvis was quick enough to seize upon the word and the idea it contained.

"Daft," he repeated. "That's jest what they are—as crazy as two Bedlamites. They escaped from me—I keep a mad-house, you know—and they are dangerous—I am Dr. Graham—I demand you to surrender them, in the name of the law."

The two Highlanders were impressed.

"Is your mad 'us at Black Rock?" inquired Sandy.

"Black Rock?" echoed Jarvis, pretending horror. "I should hope not. I have a sanitary retreat at Incledon. They came from there."

Incledon was a small hamlet on the coast fifty miles distant from Black Rock. The shepherds looked at each other significantly.

"I knew that no one would bide at Black Rock over night," said "Wully." "I knew the twa women-creatures were clean daft. And ye're their keeper? And they escaped frae ye? I kenned they wouldn't be wandering around alone without a

man with 'em if all was right. I am glad ye found 'em. They'd a froze or starved to death amang the mountains in a day or two. Their stories were altogether too curious to be true. I didn't believe in 'em for one minute," and he drew himself up importantly, pluming himself on his worldly wisdom.

"I shall have to halt to-night anyhow," said Jarvis. "My beast is tired out, and I need rest. And in the morning you'll surrender my patients to me, eh?"

"Certainly," replied Sandy. "In the morning the two puir creatures shall be given up to you. Do you take us for heathen, that we'd let them escape to perish amang the hills? They may say what they will, puir, daft things. We'll see that they go back with ye."

CHAPTER X.

A FAILURE.

A day or two after the scene in Lady Trevor's drawing-room, in which the handsome widow had found herself at such disadvantage between Lord St. Leonards on the one hand, and Mr. Pulford on the other, the Earl of Glenham returned to London from his trip to the Continent.

As the marquis had said, Lord Glenham had gone abroad upon a false clew, like very many others they had before pursued. His lordship returned disheartened and well-nigh discouraged, and proceeded directly to his town house, where his mother waited and watched, with ceaseless anxiety, for his coming.

He let himself in at the hall door, and ascended to her private sitting-room.

The countess sat alone, a book on her knee, her eyes turned towards the window in an absent, unseeing gaze. She was thin and worn; the proud and haughty old face wore a very sorrowful expression. She grieved incessantly over the unfortunate attachment of her son for one whom she honestly believed an adventuress, and whom she scorned for the

mystery of her birth. She believed his life to be blighted. She knew well, knowing his steadfast, constant nature, that he would never love another woman with the passionate love which he gave to Cecil Rosse, and she feared that if he did not find her he would never marry.

"Lord Harry Ravendale married the woman he loved, and she wrecked his life," thought the countess. "Gordon will not marry Miss Rosse, I trust, yet none the less will she be his ruin. If he had never gone to the Black Forest on that unfortunate hunting trip, he might to-day have been the happy husband of Lady Trevor."

She sighed heavily. Maldred Crafton had visited her that day, reported the failure of his own private efforts to find Cecil Rosse, and had borrowed a hundred pounds of her with which to prosecute his search. The proud lady felt humiliated in receiving the report of her confederate. She blushed now in thinking how she, the earl's mother, had persuaded his trusted friend to play the traitor to him.

"It is for Gordon's good!" she said to herself. "If the girl is found, Maldred Crafton must and shall marry her. If she were in my house at this moment I'd give her up to Crafton to save my son!"

It was at this point in her musings that the earl entered her presence.

She arose to greet him, blushing like a girl. Her proud old eyes filled with tenderness; she stood erect and stately as a palm, and stretched out her arms to him in welcome.

The earl hastened to embrace her. He kissed her affectionately, but to the mother's jealous heart something of his old tenderness was lacking. He was troubled and pre-occupied, and she believed that his heart was estranged from her.

"What news, Gordon?" she asked, resuming her seat, her lips trembling.

"No news," responded the earl, gloomily. "I went to Munich to find that I had followed an English lady and her daughter. Have you no news for me?"

"None whatever. There is a note on the table addressed to you, which was sent by Lady Trevor two days since. That may contain news."

The earl found and tore open the missive. It simply contained a request from the widow that he would call upon her immediately upon his return. He laid it upon his mother's knee.

"Lady Trevor wishes to see me," he said. "She may have received news. I will dress and go to her immediately. I will be back to dinner."

He withdrew to his own apartment. The countess rang and ordered a luncheon to be taken to him, and resumed her sorrowful reverie. As soon as the earl had dressed, he quitted the house without again seeing his mother, and proceeded on foot to South Audley street.

Lady Trevor's footman announced him and ushered him into the drawing-room, where the handsome widow, in becoming toilet, awaited visitors.

She hurried to meet him, showing signs of an emotion which he interpreted to suit himself.

"You have news of Miss Rosse?" he questioned, eagerly, shaking hands with her. "Has she written to you, Lady Trevor, in regard to her broken engagement?"

"She has not. I have no news of her," replied Lady Trevor.

The earl's countenance fell.

"I interpreted your note as indicating news of her," he said, his face pale. "I am always thinking of her, you know, hence my natural mistake. I have always been sure she would write to you sooner or later to explain her disappearance. No light, then, has been thrown upon the mystery of her loss during my absence?"

"None whatever. Sit down, Gordon. Why do you persist in searching for a woman who is dead, or who does not care for you? Believe me, if Miss Rosse loved you she would find means to communicate with you. I presume, if she lives, that she is in Australia or America, and that she has long since forgotten you."

"I do not agree with you, Lady Trevor—"

"It used to be Edith," said the widow, reproachfully. "Have I forfeited your friendship, or do you forget that we are distantly akin? I don't know how to understand your coldness."

"I did not intend to seem cold, Edith," replied the earl, gravely. "We are distant cousins, and I can never regard you as a stranger. Your sympathy in my present troubles is very sweet to me."

"Is it, Gordon? Is it really?" asked Lady Trevor, quickly. "Am I more to you than other

friends? Forgive me. You cannot understand me. You have your troubles; I have mine. I am only a weak woman—not a brave, strong man like you—and my troubles are sometimes too much for me. I wish I were dead, Gordon—I do, indeed!"

She buried her face in her lace-trimmed pocket-handkerchief, drooping her head slightly towards his shoulder.

The earl moved away unconsciously.

"You surprise me, Edith," he exclaimed. "You unhappy? *You?* What can be the matter?" and his voice was full of sympathy. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Lady Trevor sobbed softly.

"Is your grief connected with Lord St. Leonards?" asked the earl.

The widow shook her head.

"You can't possibly be embarrassed pecuniarily?"

"No—no, indeed!"

"Then what can it be? Speak out, Edith. Do not think me so selfishly absorbed in my own griefs as to be oblivious of yours. If you want a friend you know that I would gladly serve you. Tell me what troubles you."

He took her hand in his, with genuine brotherly interest, full of concern for her.

Lady Trevor hesitated. She had decided to make a bold effort to secure the earl for her lover. Knowing his nobleness and chivalry, she fancied that she might constrain him to become her suitor. But a woman, even one so hardened and scheming

as this one, does not lay aside her womanly delicacy without a pang, and she shrank from the course she had marked out for herself.

It was only when she remembered all that she had at stake that she mustered up her courage for her task.

But she shivered like one about to plunge into an icy bath, and her voice really trembled as she faltered :

"I—I am in love, Gordon. There, the secret is out !"

"In love ?" said the earl, remembering certain rumors he had heard before his departure. "Not with Mr. Pulford, Edith ? Is that it ? And do you wish me to prepare the marquis for your marriage with Pulford ?"

"No, no. I hate Mr. Pulford !" cried Lady Trevor, petulantly. "He is only my servant, although people say he is my suitor. As if I'd marry him !" she added, contemptuously.

"I am glad to hear that. I don't like the man myself," said the earl, seriously. "He is plausible, but I don't think him honest and honorable, Edith. And I am quite sure that the marquis would never have become reconciled to such a match for you. Who, then, since it is not Mr. Pulford, is your lover ?"

"I have loved him for years," sobbed Lady Trevor. "He is the noblest man in England, and the handsomest. I worship him—but I fear that he does not love me !"

The earl looked grave and uncomfortable. But

no suspicion that he was the object of the widow's affections crossed his mind.

"I don't think I quite understand you, Edith," he said, after a brief pause. "You are too proud a woman to give your love unsought—too delicate to confess to such a bestowal of your affections even in your own heart! You mean that you are loved in return, but that the gentleman has not yet in so many words told you of his love. He is poor, perhaps, and too proud to address himself to one of the richest women in England? Is that it?"

"No. Despise me as you will, Gordon, I have given my love unsought. I dare confess it to you I have borne my misery until I am nearly mad. If the man I loved were happy, I could 'die and make no sign.' But he is not. I see him pursuing a phantom when he might make me happy, and I might make him happy. He loves one unworthy of him, as far below him as a worm is below a star. And I watch his coming and going, and mourn for him, and cry at night, and wish that I were dead. Do not think me unwomanly—oh, Gordon, are you blind?"

Her voice rang out sharply in a real anguish that came from her soul.

The earl arose, his blond face flushing to the temples. He could not affect to misunderstand her. Her meaning was plain at last.

"You witness my humiliation," said Lady Trevor rising also, "but you are too noble to exult in it. I own the truth; I dare to own it for your sake, and for your mother's. The countess desires me for her

daughter, and I love her dearly. Grandpapa desires our marriage. Why waste your life in lamenting Miss Rosse? Gordon, I love you! I love you! Will you not accept my love and let me devote myself to your happiness? Have pity on me who have so humbled myself, and tell me, Gordon, that I have not done it in vain."

She waited in breathless suspense his response. She had counted on his generosity and chivalry—had she counted in vain?

His reply sounded on her ears like a knell.

"Edith," he said, in a grave, sorrowful voice, in which was only the tenderest pity, the kindest brotherly affection, "you distress me, you wrong yourself. I shall never marry unless I marry Miss Rosse. This I must say to you in justice. I am sorry for what you have told me. I trust that you have mistaken your own heart. When you think the matter over you will know that I could not be otherwise than true to Cecil and myself."

He took her hand and raised it respectfully to his lips.

Lady Trevor, with a great cry of despair, made a gesture to throw herself in his arms. He retreated abruptly, with an involuntary movement, reddening again to the roots of his blond hair.

"I must take my leave, Edith," he said, gently. "I desire to see Lord St. Leonards and Mr. Crafton this afternoon. They may have news for me."

He bade her adieu with a courtesy and respect which even her unwomanliness had not seemed to diminish, and took his leave.

Lady Trevor sank upon the sofa sobbing with rage and despair.

And at that moment, Mr. Pulford, who had witnessed the entire scene, emerged from the adjoining conservatory, saying, with a sneer, as he pinned a bouquet in the button-hole of his black coat:

"A delightful little scene, madam. So you 'hate' Pulford? You shall pay for this, my lady, when you are my wife. At present, permit me to say, it is four o'clock and the carriage is at the door, and we are going for a drive in the park. I will ring for your bonnet."

He rang and ordered the maid to bring Lady Trevor's bonnet and mantle. The widow would have rebelled and refused to accompany him, but there was a lurking devil in his eye that compelled her obedience. She entered the carriage with him and they drove to Hyde Park.

"All the world—our world—knows of our engagement, Edith," said Mr. Pulford. "You will meet many well-bred stares to-day. Be prepared for them. By the by, my dear Edith," and he looked at her, and she saw again the lurking devil that had scared her; "don't think I have forgotten the scene I just witnessed in your drawing-room. I shall pay you all I owe you, after our marriage, with interest a thousand-fold!"

And Lady Trevor knew that if he obtained the opportunity, he would keep his word.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Hyde Park wore its most brilliant aspect upon that bright May afternoon. The fashionable world was sunning itself in luxurious carriages drawn by high-stepping horses, and attended by coachmen and footmen in livery. Ladies, in elegant attire, half reclined upon silken cushions, exchanging gay smiles and greetings as the two lines of carriages slowly passed each other. Men renowned in statesmanship, in art, and science, and in literature, had their place in the gay throng. The less fortunate persons, who sat upon the benches lining the drive, or wandered by the Serpentine, watched the splendid parade, and made audible comment upon those who took part in it.

One of the handsomest equipages displayed was that of Lady Trevor.

The horses possessed both spirit and beauty. The carriage of mulberry color, ornamented with a gilded crest, was lined with tufted satin. The hammercloth, of mulberry color, was decorated also with a crest embroidered in gold thread, and the

pompous coachman, in livery of dark green and gold, who sat upon it, presented an imposing appearance. Two footmen in similar livery at the back of the carriage added to the dignity of the turn-out.

"My!" said a poor, consumptive-looking woman who sat upon one of the benches, regarding this equipage enviously. "That lady ought to be happy!"

And Lady Trevor certainly looked happy. She was dressed handsomely, her brunette face was at its brightest. She smiled and bowed as if she had never known a care. No one looking at her would have dreamed that under that bright and gracious exterior were a host of evil passions in full activity; no one would have dreamed that the gay hat covered a scheming brain—that she was angry and disappointed, the victim of baffled hopes, and that she loathed and hated with indescribable bitterness the man who sat smiling at her side, and whom her fashionable friends now knew to be her betrothed suitor. And no one would have dreamed that beneath her velvet bodice were hidden two simple looking vials, the contents of which were deadly poison, and that she carried them with her everywhere, because she dared not leave them at home.

Mr. Pulford felt himself very important; he exulted in his power over his unwilling bride; he exulted in his prospective wealth and position; he ordered the servants with the air of a master; he bowed to his friends with the graciousness he deemed befitting the future owner of Lady Trevor's immense estates.

"Edith, my dear," he said, smilingly, bowing to an acquaintance, lightly lifting his hat, "you see it is as I said. Every one knows of our intended marriage. Do you notice how people regard you? I fancy many hopes are blighted because I have snapped up the prize for which so many were sighing."

"You express yourself elegantly," remarked Lady Trevor. "People certainly do look wonderingly at me. I can see that they are surprised at my choice," she added, with a bitterness she could not conceal.

"People are always surprised at a love-match," remarked Mr. Pulford, blandly. "Ah, General," and he raised his hat again as a carriage passed. "As I was saying, Edith, our little romance attracts attention. I have procured the insertion of the notices of our approaching marriage in all the fashionable newspapers, and have selected some fine jewels to be set as a bracelet, my bridal gift to you."

"Which I shall have to pay for," muttered the widow, under her breath.

"Which I will pay for," amended Mr. Pulford, suavely, "out of the money which I shall receive with my wife! *My* money, Edith, be pleased to remember. There will be no marriage-settlements, my dear!"

"I hate you!" breathed Lady Trevor, in a low, hissing voice, too low for the ears of her footmen.

Mr. Pulford turned his gaze upon her. A young lady in a passing carriage commented to her companion upon the vulgarity of engaged people making

love so openly in the park. Certainly, his gaze looked like that of a lover. He was smiling, gentle, and bland as the sunshine, but Lady Trevor saw again the lurking devil in his eyes—the baleful menace expressed in his look, and which sent again a shivering terror to her very soul.

"My dear Edith," he said, softly, "your pretty endearments are delightful to me. I shall remember them all and will return them with interest. Remember! My darling, don't you see Lady Glenham?"

Lady Trevor bowed to the stately, gray-haired countess, who sat alone, and Mr. Pulford raised his hat.

"Did you fulfill my injunctions in regard to your shopping to-day, Edith?" inquired Mr. Pulford, in the soft tones that grated on Lady Trevor's ears and aroused all her animosity to him.

"Yes," she answered, a little sullenly, but with an evil gleam in her hard black eyes. "I went shopping!" And unconsciously her gloved hand went to her bosom, where the vials she had bought were safely hidden.

"And I hope you ordered a magnificent trousseau, Edith," said Mr. Pulford, delighted to use her name familiarly, because he knew she resented the familiarity, and hated the name as uttered by his lips. "I want all London to talk about your gowns. You must send to Paris for the wedding-dress, and see the best milliners in London about the others. I will have a fashion reporter catalogue your garments, and a description of them shall be printed in

the newspapers, after the French and American fashion. I want the wedding talked about. I mean to enter fashionable life—to make my debut—in a full blaze of glory."

Lady Trevor bit her lips. She could not trust herself to answer.

At that moment they passed the carriage of the old Marquis of St. Leonards.

The old lord, haughty and grim, his bristling white eyebrows and mustaches giving him more than ever a leonine look, averted his gaze from his granddaughter, appearing absorbed in the contemplation of a restive horse in front of his own. The Earl of Glenham was with him. It had happened that when the young lord had called at St. Leonards House the marquis had been in the act of stepping into his carriage for a solitary drive. He had begged the earl to accompany him, and had hastened to tell him of Lady Trevor's latest folly in engaging herself to "that fellow Pulford."

As the widow now looked up, she met the grave, perplexed glance of the blond earl, to gain whose love she had so vainly humiliated herself a few hours earlier. She saw at a glance that he had heard of her engagement, and she flushed hotly. He raised his hat to her courteously; she bowed; and the carriages separated, proceeding in different directions.

With the rememberance of that fair and haughty face, so noble, so handsome, vividly in her mind, the widow stole a look at her companion. Pulford looked sly, secret and ignoble; his plausible face

had an expression that seemed actually mean in contrast to that other countenance ; his high, narrow forehead, and small eyes, full sandy beard, and florid features, appeared to Lady Trevor absolutely repulsive. She drew away from him in an uncontrollable disgust.

He comprehended her emotions, and added one more to the list of debts he owed her, and which he had sworn to pay.

They rode on in silence, bearing their part in the great parade with smiling grace.

A momentary halt of a carriage in front of them compelled them also to stand still.

They were at the moment very near a wayside bench upon which two women were sitting. One of these, an English servant in the white cap and apron of a French *bonne*, divided her attention between two or three elegantly dressed children who played upon the grass behind her, and the long line of vehicles with their occupants in front.

The woman who sat beside the nurse was thin and gaunt, with a pale, sickly visage, upon which was an expression of sullen discontent. Her sharp features told a story of privation and want. Her bony, ungloved fingers, with roughened surface, told of long toil with the needle. Her dress was of worn black alpaca, shabby and gray with long use. Her bonnet was a relic of the previous winter, and her shawl was old and faded. Her entire appearance presented a sharp contrast to that of the ladies whom she regarded with envying gaze ; but as she bore no parcel the keen-eyed park-keepers had had

no right to forbid her entrance into this precinct of luxury and fashion.

"It's hard, ain't it," this woman had recently been saying, discontentedly, to the nurse, who was evidently an old acquaintance, "that some can ride in carriages and some must go afoot? It's hard that them women, who are no better than I, should I have their rich gowns, and their gay hats, and their servants in livery, and ride out to take the air, while can hardly spare the time to spend one hour here in the park, and I sick, too! I shall have to sew an hour later to-night to make it up. I'm tired of living. I'm that tired I'd like to die!"

"Don't, Sarah," said the nurse, soothingly. "You have plenty of work to do—"

"At starvation prices!"

"You have three children—"

"Who are a burden, and no help to me! They are not old enough to bring in money!"

"Lor', Sarah Peters, you are ungrateful to Providence. Your three boys'll earn money by and by, and support you handsomely."

"More like they'll send me to the Union when I get helpless," said Mrs. Peters, sourly. "If it wasn't for a hope I've got I would have given up long ago, that I would!"

"And that hope, what is it?"

"That's my business. I'm always looking for a face that yet I never see. Winter and summer I've come to the park and watched them carriages come and go in the hope of seeing that one face, but I'm always disappointed. Now I am determined to

come day after day for a month. I may be disappointed, as I've always been before, but my luck may turn at last, and I may see the face I want. I should know it at a glance," muttered Mrs. Peters, more to herself than to her interested companion. "It's years and years since I saw the face, but I'd know it. I know that I shall find it some time, and when I do I shall not know poverty again!"

"Lor' sakes, Sarah Peters, you've gone out of your head. How can the sight of a 'face' make you rich?"

"You'll see!" was the mysterious response. "Once let me see that face, and I won't never sew for slop-shops no more. I'll change my garret for two nice rooms. I'll give these clothes to a beggar, and put on soft stuffs and silks like these ladies wear, and I'll go down to Margate for a month, and I'll put the boys to school, and I'll lead an easy life, see if I don't. But no such luck for me," she added, sullenly. "The face may not be in England. I have no reason to suppose that it is. It may have mouldered under the sod years and years ago!"

"Is the face that of one of your relations, Sarah Peters?" asked the nurse, curiously.

"No, it ain't. Do I look like a person to have relations that might ride in Hyde Park? It's the face of one that'd be no friend to me, that'd rather see a snake than to see me," said Mrs. Peters. "It's the face of one that's in my power, and I can screw money out of its owner to keep me in comfort while I live. Heavens!" she ejaculated, starting and

growing white, and clutching the nurse by the arm, "there it is! *there it is now!*"

It was at this moment that Lady Trevor's carriage had paused for a second near the bench. And it was at Lady Trevor's brunette face that Sarah Peters was staring with wild eyes and livid countenance.

"Where?" asked the nurse, excitedly.

"There! The lady in the black bonnet with pink roses and pink feathers!"

"*That?* Is that the lady?" cried the nurse, in amazement.

The procession moved slowly on. Sarah Peters watched breathlessly the smiling visage of the handsome widow, and crouched back upon the bench, half behind her companion, as the hard black eyes glanced carelessly in her direction.

"The same! It is the same!" she breathed, softly. "I know that I am not mistaken. I have found her at last!"

She sat in a sort of stupor until the carriage had passed on. Then she roused herself and made a movement to arise and follow it, but the nurse pulled her back by her shawl.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Sarah Peters," advised the woman, roughly. "You'll be took up by one of them p'liece if you speak to that lady. You are out of your head, or else you're mistaken. That lady is one of the greatest ladies in England!"

"You know her?" cried Mrs. Peters, turning upon her companion eagerly. "Who is she? What's her name?"

"If she's in your power, likely you know her name."

"I don't know it, but I will find it out. I'll follow up the carriage if you don't tell me—"

"Then you'll get arrested. You're crazy, Sarah, that's what you are. That lady is one of the richest ladies in England—"

"Rich, is she?" interrupted Mrs. Peters, eagerly. "I'm glad of that. Her name?"

"She's the granddaughter of the great Marquis of St. Leonards, one of the richest noblemen in England, and one of the greatest statesmen," said the nurse, volubly. "I'm here in the park every sunny day with the children, and I know most of the great people by sight. The lady is a widow, and her husband was a baronet; she is Lady Trevor."

Mrs. Peters repeated her name.

"The gentleman with her is the one they say she is making a love-match with," continued the nurse. "He's below her, but, lor', when people loves, they don't always stop to ask a fortune and a pedigree. It does me good to see a great proud lady like that fall in love with a man that's below her!"

"A widow, eh? Then her first husband's dead?" said Sarah Peters, musingly.

"Dead more'n a year ago. He was wild and bad, was Sir Albert Trevor. Her ladyship's grandfather, the marquis, was against the match, and never spoke to Sir Albert nor to Lady Trevor after her marriage till she had been a year a widow," explained the nurse, delighted to air her knowledge

of the aristocracy. "Law, I can tell you lots about the great folks, Sarah Peters. I know as much as most, having lived in more than one titled family."

"Then perhaps you can tell me if this rich Lady Trevor has any children?"

"Not one."

"She hasn't got a daughter, then?" asked Mrs. Peters, disappointedly. "I didn't think it likely—it could hardly have been—but then, with all her money, it might have lived, after all. They say that these big doctors can cure a'most anything."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Sarah Peters. I knows a girl as knows Cerise, Lady Trevor's own French maid, and Lady Trevor never had a child in her life."

Mrs. Peters stared, perplexed.

"There's some mistake here," she exclaimed. "She did have a child—"

"I say she didn't! I ought to know better than you. Why, you didn't know her name till I told you!"

The astonishment in her companion's face aroused in Mrs. Peters a sense of caution.

"Perhaps I'm mistaken," she said, in a constrained voice. "Likely I am. I don't think this can be the same lady that I knew of. The one I knew, or heard of, wasn't such a great person; at least, she didn't pretend to be."

Mrs. Peters endeavored to turn the conversation and to obliterate the impression her words had made upon the mind of her companion. Having

succeeded in convincing the nurse that she had been mistaken, Mrs. Peters finally arose and departed, quitting the park.

Once outside, she hurried swiftly to the nearest chemist's shop and asked to see a London Directory. Her request was granted, and she hastily turned over its leaves in search of the name of Lady Trevor.

She found it and wrote down the address upon a scrap of paper and hurried again into the street, her sickly face flushed, her manner full of suppressed excitement.

"No more work for me," she muttered. "My working days are over. Lady Trevor can't refuse to give me something for my support—even if the child is dead! I will see her this evening!"

CHAPTER XII.

A HIGHLAND HAMLET.

Miss Rosse and her old servant had gone to sleep in the shepherds' hut almost in the very minute their weary heads had touched the rude pillows. Their slumbers had been profound, both being tired to exhaustion. The sound of Gretchen's breathing filled the room. It would have required a strong effort to awaken her, and the noise made by Jarvis when he rode up and loudly interrogated the shepherds did not arouse or disturb her.

But Cecil, tired as she was, was awakened by that hostile approach. At the first utterance of Jarvis' coarse voice, she started broad awake upon the instant. She did not move, but lay silent and breathless, listening to the conversation that followed. And when the conversation had died out, and the three men sat down upon the ground to smoke their pipes together, still she did not stir, and still she hushed her breathing lest in some way she should betray her wakefulness.

She comprehended that Jarvis had successfully imposed upon the two simple tenders of flocks

—that the men believed him the proprietor of a mad house and herself and Gretchen escaped patients.

"All that we can say or do will not convince them to the contrary," she thought. "Our ignorance of our whereabouts made our host think us mad before Jarvis came. The shepherds will deliver us up to Jarvis, and he will kill us. Is there no escape?"

She kept quite silent until the smell of the tobacco smoke had vanished, and a later conversation among the three men had been followed by a deep silence, and later by the sound of deep and stertorous breathing.

She was quite sure that the two shepherds, used to very early hours, had fallen asleep. Presently, she crept out of her bunk like a shadow, and flitted to the aperture in the wall that served as a window. One corner of the oiled paper was loosened. She lifted it up and cautiously looked out.

The night was bright with starlight. The mountain-peaks, with their snowy crests, glittered in the moonlight. The farther portions of the valley lay in the shadow of the hills, but the group near the hut was as plainly revealed as if it were day.

The two shepherds had wrapped themselves in their plaids, which they had flung over their shoulders at nightfall, and so happened to have at hand, and were lying on the ground fast asleep.

Jarvis was sitting up, alert and watchful. He had determined not to sleep, but to seize upon his prizes at daybreak and retreat towards the sea-coast and Black Rock, and he had decided in his own mind

that he would not be burdened by the two women throughout the journey.

"The Devil's Gap is the very place at which to get rid on 'em!" he was saying to himself, while Cecil regarded him. "I'll scare their ponies in the most dangerous spot and send 'em over the precipice into kingdom come. Best to wait till morning to give the horses a rest!"

He looked at his ponies, which had strayed to a little distance, glanced at the sleeping men, and at the hut, yawned once or twice with sleepiness and weariness, and drew out his bottle of Scotch whiskey, raising it to his lips. He took a copious draught, and followed that by a second yet more liberal.

"A cold night," he muttered. "The wind comes down them mountain passes as if it blew over icebergs. I shall catch my death if I ain't careful."

Due consideration for his valuable health prompted him to take yet a third potion of whiskey. Then he restored the bottle to his pocket and resumed his watch and guard over the supposed sleeping women.

His liberal potations, added to his fatigue, were not conducive to wakefulness. He presently began to nod, starting up every few seconds to glare about him suspiciously. Then his head sunk forward upon his breast, and a little later he appeared to have fallen asleep.

Cecil watched him for a little while, her active brain busy with plans. Neither she nor Gretchen had undressed. Having made up her mind to a course of action, the young girl crept across the floor again as noiselessly as possible and stood beside

Gretchen's bunk. She laid one hand softly upon the old woman's mouth to prevent any outcry, and with the other gently shook her.

The shaking had to be repeated several times more and more vigorously, and Cecil had begun to despair of success, when the old woman yawned audibly and opened her eyes.

The sight of the pale young face, illumined by two anxious, burning eyes, bending above her, so startled Gretchen that she could neither move nor speak.

The soft hand pressed warningly upon her old and withered mouth.

"Hush!" whispered the girl, in her very ear. "Not a word, Gretchen. Jarvis is here!"

The woman started again, but did not speak. She trembled under Cecil's touch, and her eyes expressed anxiety and terror.

"The shepherds mean to give us to him," continued the girl, calmly, still in the ear of her servant. "Jarvis pretends that he is a mad-doctor, and that we are two escaped patients."

Old Gretchen drew her breath hard.

"But all is not lost!" went on the low, subtle whisper. "Jarvis means to take us away at daybreak, and the shepherds have consented. But meantime the Highlanders have gone to sleep. And Jarvis himself, who meant to watch all night, has been drinking whiskey to keep warm and is, I think, overcome with drink. He has closed his eyes and is nodding!"

A flash of hope was emitted by the old woman's eyes, just now despairing.

"You understand, Gretchen? We may possibly escape, but if so, we must go *now*."

The old woman nodded assent. She was quite calm by this time, having obtained full self-possession and self-control. Cecil removed her hand, and Gretchen slowly and silently gathered herself to an upright position, descending to the floor.

"Shall we start now?" she asked. "This minute?"

Cecil glided to the window.

The shepherds were still fast asleep. And, in spite of his resolves and incentives to keep awake, Jarvis had yielded to the combined effects of the whiskey and fatigue and was sound asleep also.

The girl returned to her companion.

"Come!" she said. "This is our opportunity!"

Gretchen picked up the bag, in which still remained a supply of food, and slung it over her shoulder. Cecil undid the rude and simple fastening, and softly opened the door. It creaked upon its hinges. Gretchen gave up all for lost. Cecil listened, then drew her companion forward, and they stepped across the threshold.

Had Jarvis been awake he could not have helped seeing the fugitives, but, fortunately for them, he continued to sleep. Cecil drew the door shut cautiously. She thought it possible that one of the men might awaken before morning, and she desired the discovery of her flight to be deferred to as late an hour as possible.

She led the way in the direction of the ponies. They had not been tethered, Jarvis having trusted to the good pasturage and their fatigue to prevent their straying. They were now all lying down, and their bridles were still upon them.

Cecil seized the long straps and two of the ponies arose to their feet. Gretchen aroused the two others. The women mounted with some little difficulty and moved slowly from the vicinity of the hut, each leading an extra horse. The one Gretchen had ridden the previous day seeming hopelessly lame, they let it go, and it lay down again upon the grass.

Their movements had been so cautious and the ponies had been so quiet that the three men remained undisturbed. The fugitives, however, did not breathe freely until half a mile of distance had been placed between them and their enemies. Miss Rosse then quickened her pony's pace to a jog, and they pressed onward, still in silence.

It was not until a backward glance over her shoulder assured old Gretchen that the hut was completely lost to view that she dared trust her voice in speech. Then she exclaimed :

"Thank the Lord for this second escape ! We're clear of 'em. Miss Cecil—we're quite clear of 'em ! They've only the lame pony to follow us with—they can never overtake us !"

"Especially as they are not likely to waken before daybreak," said Cecil, cheerfully, "and by that time we shall be several miles away. I don't like to urge the ponies after their hard work of to-day, but we have no alternative. Every mile of

distance now between us and our enemies is an additional safeguard."

She patted her rough Highland steed, and continued to urge him forward. Mile after mile was traversed. They went out of the valley through a wild, dark mountain-pass, where the footing was precarious and the pathway scarcely six feet wide. Gretchen was heavy, and her tired beast showed signs of excessive fatigue. Making a mis-step, or slipping upon a round stone, they scarcely knew which, this pony went suddenly sprawling towards the edge of the abyss. Gretchen, with a scream, sprang off just in time to save herself. The pony went crashing down into darkness and space.

Cecil, with her led pony, was fortunately in advance. She stopped in amazement at the first indication of trouble, and slipped to the ground and ran to Gretchen's side as the latter fell upon the ground and the unfortunate steed disappeared.

"Are you hurt?" she exclaimed. "Speak to me, Gretchen—"

The old woman groaned lustily.

"I'm not hurt, Miss Cecil," she answered, "but I'm scared to death! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Get up, that's a dear!" coaxed the young girl, trembling with fright. "Perhaps you have broken a limb? Oh, Gretchen! My poor Gretchen—"

"I've broken both legs, and all my arms!" cried Gretchen, quite overcome with the magnitude of the peril she had escaped, and with the sympathy of her frightened young mistress. "And my back feels queer! The pony's gone over the precipice,

and it is a wonder I am not over also! Oh, Miss Cecil, I can't get up—"

"Nonsense!" cried the young lady, seeing that the old woman needed less sympathetic treatment, and speaking with cheerful authority. "Get up, Gretchen, that's a darling! Come, now. I shall pull you up."

She put her slender arms around the old woman, who yielded to the light pressure brought to bear, ashamed of being a dead weight upon a strength not too great after so many demands upon it. Once on her feet Gretchen shook herself, found that she had no bones broken, after all, and then began to pour forth her gratitude to Heaven in a fervent prayer, uttered in her native tongue.

"You must mount my led pony," said Cecil, when the old servant paused for sheer lack of breath. "We are fortunate in having two animals left."

She gave her arm to Gretchen, who limped painfully forward, exclaiming with a groan:

"I am so fearfully bruised, Miss Cecil, that I can scarcely stand. How shall I ever ride, and without a saddle?"

"Try, for my sake, Gretchen. We are still too near our enemies to halt."

Miss Rosse helped the old woman upon the back of one of the ponies, herself mounted the other and they resumed their journey. The accident, and the shock it had given Gretchen's nerves, made the old woman timid and nervous; she groaned continually and complained of her back until her young mis-

tress began to fear lest her spine had been seriously injured.

"If it pains you to ride we will stop, Gretchen," said the girl, gently. "Shall we come to a halt?"

"No, I would rather die in flight than be killed by that Jarvis. We'll keep on, Miss Cecil, although every time this pony sets down his foot hard, or stumbles, I feel as if I should die."

They kept on accordingly hour after hour. Before morning they entered a long and beautiful valley, through which a broad stream of water ran. The ponies, quite worn out, stumbled at nearly every step. Cecil deemed it best, in mercy to the beasts, to come to a halt, and the two women dismounted near the bank of the creek and turned the animals loose.

Gretchen sank down upon the cold, damp grass, groaning heavily.

The shadows that precede the morning were lying thickly over the landscape. The air was keener and colder than heretofore, penetrating with a chill to the very bones of the fugitives. Cecil removed her own outer garment and laid it in a roll under Gretchen's head to serve as a pillow, and then paced to and fro to keep her blood in circulation. She ached in every bone and joint; she was tired beyond description; but her anxieties were too many and too heavy to permit her to sleep. Gretchen dropped into a doze, the ponies stretched themselves upon the grass, but she continued her faltering walk, her sorrowful eyes turned upward at the dusky sky, an unspoken prayer rising from the

depths of her young soul to the very throne of Mercy above.

The day dawned. One by one the snowy mountain peaks flushed with rose and then stood out upon the horizon white and gleaming. The valley became illuminated with the sunlight, and a slow warmth transfused the air. After awhile, Cecil, overcome with weariness, lay down upon the grass also and slept.

It was high noon when she and Gretchen awakened. They made a breakfast from the contents of their bag. Then they walked about, the old woman complaining bitterly of pain in her spine, and severe bruises all over her person.

It was not until the middle of the afternoon that they remounted, continuing their journey. There were no more mountain-passes to thread, but the path was often steep and stony, and now and then they were obliged to ford a stream, no bridge presenting itself in their way.

Late in the evening they encamped for the night. They made beds of pine branches and slept upon them tranquilly under the cold light of the stars. They mounted again at daybreak and rode wearily onward, wondering if their journey would never end.

Late that afternoon they came upon a little Highland hamlet, a collection of shepherds' huts, in a beautiful valley by a flowing river. There were several farms scattered about, all under more or less cultivation, and the houses with their thatched roofs, and with outlying stables, barns, and ricks, pre-

sented an appearance to the eyes of the fugitives at once wonderful and beautiful beyond description.

"Safe at last!" cried Cecil. "Our enemies will not dare attack us here, even if they overtake us."

"We have reached a refuge just in time," exclaimed Gretchen. "I couldn't travel five miles further to save my life. And you are tired out, Miss Cecil, although you don't complain. You look ready to drop with fatigue."

Cecil did not reply. In truth, she had been sustained during this last day's journey only by her high courage and her resolute will. Her stock of strength, not too great at the beginning of her flight, owing to the long captivity that had preceded it, had been drawn upon until not a vestige of it remained. The near prospect of safety and shelter nearly overwhelmed her. She trembled in her saddle. Her heart beat feebly and irregularly. Her hands could scarcely cling to her steed.

They stopped at the nearest farm-house. The entire family, father, mother, two stalwart sons and two buxom daughters, with several dependents, hurried out, full of curiosity at the strange intrusions.

Cecil slipped to the ground, advanced a step, tried to speak—and fell forward, fainting dead away.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONDITIONAL PROTECTION.

The master of the farm-house, a stout and rugged Highlander, sprang forward and caught Cecil as her slight figure swayed forward, and she lay white and swooning in his arms. Motioning the bystanders aside, he carried her into the house.

The Highland women, compassionate and wondering, struck by the girl's marvelous beauty, and her helplessness, hurried after him. Old Gretchen followed, limping, groaning and lamenting.

The farmer entered the great kitchen of the dwelling and laid Cecil upon a low and homely couch near a window. Her head fell back upon the pillow, her eyes were closed, her features were sharply outlined ; she looked as if she were dead.

Gretchen, with a great cry, forgetting her own weariness, bent over the form of her young mistress, calling her name, and chafing her thin hands. The farmer and his sons retired to the door-yard, to look after the exhausted ponies. The farmer's wife burned feathers under Cecil's nose ; the farmer's daughters brought cold water, Scotch whiskey, and

such other simple remedies as they deemed appropriate or useful.

Under these efficient ministrations Cecil presently uttered a low, sobbing sigh, and opened her dusky eyes in a slow, wondering expression, to be exchanged for one of recognition.

The girl was too weary and spent to move a limb or muscle. The softness of the couch was delicious to her. She did not speak, except to answer interrogations showered upon her, but Gretchen hastened to ask the housewife for shelter for the night.

"The MacDougals never turned even a beggar from their door," was the answer, given with a sort of pride. "Ye are welcome to stay as long as ye like, woman, both you and the puir lassie there, who will not be fit to travel for a week."

The farmer's wife waited to ask no questions as to her visitors, who they were, whence they came, or whither they were going, but ordered a maid to prepare the "spare chamber" at once for their occupancy.

Then the farmer's daughters set to work at the evening meal, which had been in course of preparation at the moment of the visitors' arrival. Gretchen talked with Mrs. MacDougal, while Miss Rosse, lying back upon the chintz pillow, in a delicious restfulness, her gaze wandering from object to object, took in all the features of the room.

It reminded her of the great living-rooms of Zorlitz. It had the same quaint air, the low ceiling with smoke blackened beams, the stone floor, the immense chimney with swinging kettles and blazing

wood fire, but the Highland kitchen lacked certain picturesque features for which those of the Black Forest had been distinguished. To Cecil the room was more beautiful than any ideal palace. Its warmth and shelter, the friendly faces and kindly voices within it, thrilled her soul with joy and rest.

A large table in the centre of the big room had been laid for supper. Mrs. MacDougal and her daughters dished up the meal and summoned the men. The family sat down to dinner, giving Gretchen a place of honor. Cecil did not rise, and Miss MacDougal, a buxom young woman with a coarse face and heavy tread, but with kindly, admiring eyes, waited upon her with assiduous care.

The family meal of porridge, oat-cakes, brawn, and milk, was shared by Gretchen with relish. For Cecil, Mrs. MacDougal prepared a tray of more delicate food, a pot of fragrant tea—a beverage used in that household only upon rare occasions—a dish of toast and poached eggs, and some orange marmalade.

Miss Rosse sipped her tea and ate her toast at her leisure. When the family had finished, the servants, who had sat also at the table, departed to their tasks, the farmer's sons and daughters accompanying them.

The Highlander and his wife, with Gretchen, drew near the girl's couch.

"Your ponies are clean knockit up, Miss," said MacDougal, politely. "They won't be able to travel the morrow, if ever. The puir beasties seem

to have been hard pushed—like yersels. Hae ye traveled far?"

"For three or four days," replied Cecil, wearily.

"So long as that? Had ye no man with ye, Miss?"

"No, we were quite alone, Gretchen and I. We came from the sea-coast—from an old house known as Black Rock."

The farmer and his wife exchanged incredulous glances.

"Black Rock, the seat of the Cathcairns, ye dinna mean, Miss?" asked the farmer.

Cecil replied in the affirmative.

"That is a far distance by mountain passes an' lonely valleys," said Mr. MacDougal. "I've heard the story of the Cathcairns—every one in the Northern Hielan's kens it well. We tell it winter nights aboot the fires, Miss, an' it's a tale to send ye to bed timorsome and fu' o' terrors. It's a long, hard journey frae the Nor'west coast to this place—a terrible journey. And ye say ye cam' on them twa ponies, without saddles, and all alane?"

"All alone—we two!" said Cecil.

"But ye dinna mean, o' coorse, that ye cam' frae Black Rock House, Miss? That hae been shuttit up a lifetime. The ghosts of the twin brithers walk there, they say."

"We have spent the winter at Black Rock House," said Cecil. "We did not know the traditions connected with the place."

Again the farmer and his wife exchanged glances.

Cecil hesitated about telling her story. After the

manner in which it had been received by the two shepherds, she did not like to rehearse a tale which must seem so improbable. But Gretchen, relying upon the truthfulness of her statements, and desirous of securing the friendship and championship of these new acquaintances before the possible arrival of Jarvis in pursuit, determined to tell everything boldly.

"I don't know how we can explain matters to you so that you will fully understand them," she said, in a perplexed voice. "What we cannot understand ourselves must seem strange indeed to you, but I'll tell the whole thing straightforward."

"Ay, woman," said MacDougal. "Do that!"

"My young mistress is a lady by birth and education," said Gretchen, "but, through the death of her uncle, she is obliged to earn her own living. So we went to London. My young lady could teach in a school or family; she has all the accomplishments noble ladies learn, but she knew no one in England who could recommend her, and besides, she would not be separated from me, the pastor's old servant who cared for her in her pretty childhood and who actually worships her to-day. We would not be separated, so my young lady procured embroidery-work to do at home."

"Well?" said Mr. MacDougal, as Gretchen paused and glanced at the thin and shadowy young face on the pillow, with a tender yearning in her gaze. "That dinna explain your appearance here, woman."

"A rich lady saw Miss Cecil's work, and hired her

to go to her country-house in Yorkshire to repair some valuable tapestry," continued old Gretchen. "The lady advised us to sail in her yacht, and save our traveling expenses, as the yacht was ordered to go to her country place and must sail in any case immediately. We drove to Gravesend and embarked on the yacht. We were at sea several days, and were landed at Black Rock, where we have remained ever since—a period of seven months or so!"

"This is vera strange. Black Rock does not belong to a lady. The present owners, distant relatives of the Cathcairns, never visit the spot. They have left the auld house to fa' to ruin."

"There is some mystery in the affair that we cannot attempt to solve," said Cecil, gently. "We do not believe that Lady Trevor, the lady who employed me, knows that we were brought to Scotland."

"My young lady has an enemy," said Gretchen, "a terrible and secret enemy. That enemy contrived to know of her engagement to Lady Trevor, and to take advantage of it. We were put on board the wrong yacht, or else Miss Cecil's enemy bought over the captain of Lady Trevor's yacht to aid his own wicked purposes. We were brought to Black Rock, where a man and woman were in charge. So well had Miss Cecil's enemy understood her engagement to Lady Trevor, and so well had he contrived affairs, that we found a room at Black Rock hung with tapestry, just as we expected, and

my young lady went to work to repair it, supposing that we were at Lady Trevor's house."

"Curious—vera curious," commented MacDougal, eyeing both the strangers sharply.

"We never suspected our terrible mistake, or the awful conspiracy against us," continued Gretchen, "till a few weeks ago, when I heard the man Jarvis and his wife and a Portuguese woman with them plotting to kill my young lady and me. They discovered us listening and would have killed us on the spot, but that they were compelled to remain at Black Rock longer, and feared our ghosts would haunt them. They shut us up as prisoners in the old tower and waited for warmer weather. The other night they crept up to our rooms to complete their evil work—to stab us to death in our sleep."

MacDougal expressed his amazement, and Gretchen, warming with an indignant sense of her own and Miss Cecil's wrongs, told in a graphic and spirited manner the incidents of that fearful night on which they had escaped from their enemies. She described the steps upon the old stairs, the stealthy sound at the doors, the refuge in the old chimney-recess, the silent entrance of the intending assassins, the outcry, the alarm, the escape.

And then she described their flight, its terrors and adventures, the shepherd's hut and the second escape from Jarvis, the loss of the pony in a mountain-pass, and her own narrow escape from death, and concluded by imploring MacDougal to befriend her young mistress and herself.

"I know that Jarvis is hurrying after us," she

exclaimed. "Miss Cecil cannot go on to-morrow. He may find us here. Tell us that he shall not harm us, Mr. MacDougal, that you will protect us. In the name of Heaven, befriend two helpless beings who are cast upon your mercy."

"It's a vera strange story," said the Highlander, cautiously, his face wearing a puzzled expression. "I never heard the like. But as you say, you'll not be able to travel for some days to coom. The young lady is tired out, and ye look the same. Ye shall have food an' shelter ; make yoursels comfortable on that."

"And protection, too ?" asked Gretchen, eagerly. "If Jarvis come, will you protect us ?"

The Highlander scratched his head.

"Wull, ye see, woman," he said, "there's always twa sides to a story. I maun hear the ither side afore I promise."

Gretchen wrung her hands together. Cecil's pale, thin face grew paler, and she made a feeble attempt to rise.

"Dinna ye fash yersels !" exclaimed MacDougal. "Ye can stay, an' welcome. But I'll tell ye freely your story does not sound well. People do no murders in this country an' age o' the worl', or if they do, it's in wicked Lun'on and the South, and not in the Hielan's. I doot but the young lady has rin awa' frae her hame. I doot but there's a fause lover somewhere, or that she rebels against law an' authority contrary to the Holy Scriptures, an' that ye aid an' abet her. So I maun hear the ither side."

"Jarvis will tell you that he is a mad-house

keeper, and that we are escaped patients," said Cecil, bitterly.

MacDougal regarded the visitors suspiciously. It seemed to him that such a statement would certainly have a strong air of probability. He began to think it might be the true solution of this strange affair. There certainly was a "daft" appearance about the old "foreign woman."

"I resairve my joodjment until the man Jairvis appears," he announced. "An' when I hae heard baith sides o' the case I maun gie my decision. Whichever seems most probable I shall favor."

Mrs. MacDougal, a strong-featured, sandy-haired woman, with a decided spirit of her own, who had listened to the story with keen and vivid interest, watching the beautiful young girl on the couch with a gaze of rapt admiration, now interposed:

"Dinna ye fash yersel," she exclaimed. "I believe ye baith. If ony man Jairvis or what ither name he maun ca' hisself, cooms here, he shall be walkit off wi' a flea in his lug. Mind that, Willum! Jean MacDougal taks these puir women under her own protection, an' they shall bide safe in this hoose, an' gae safe awa' when they hae restid. Mind that, Willum."

Mrs. MacDougal appeared like an angel of mercy to the worn-out fugitives, her light-gray eyes flashing, her strong features working in excess of indignant feeling.

"We'll see, we'll see," said the master of the house, all the more set in his resolve because his wife had espoused the cause of these strangers.

"Dinna ye bind yersel' wi' a fulish promise, Jean. We maun hear the ither side—"

"The ither side!" repeated Mrs. MacDougal, scornfully. "I'll stan' by my ain sect, Willum. These are women, so am I, an' I'll na men-folk rin on 'em. This hoose is their sanctooary. They shall stay or gae, as they wull!"

A maid entered and whispered in her mistress' ear.

Mrs. MacDougal arose.

"The prophet's chamber is ready," she announced, employing the ancient phrase by which the spare chamber is still often known in country places, in allusion to the occasional visits of some minister who is invited to occupy it. "I'll tak' ye to it mysel'."

Gretchen arose, but paused, picking at her gown nervously.

"I cannot sleep if I am to have the terror of that man Jarvis before my eyes," she exclaimed. "Mr. MacDougal, can I say nothing to convince you that I have told the truth? If you would only believe us, and promise to protect us, we would bless you for your goodness. But if you resolve to listen to Jarvis, we are lost!"

"If ye speak truth," said the farmer, "ye can prove it. Is not this sae? An' if ye prove it, I'll be yer fren'."

"But how can I prove it?" asked Gretchen, despairingly. "You won't take our word."

"Ye say the man Jairvis ha' but a lame pony. He'll be a day or more in cooming here. I can

keep him waitin' a few days an' ye like. The young lady is na fit to travel at present. Ye hae friends, belike. Write to them, an' wait here till ye get an answer. If they corroborate your words, well and guid. If not, let the man Jairvis be believit."

Cecil's face showed her despair. She thought of her landlady, Mrs. Thomas, of Queen's Crescent, Bayswater, but, although Mrs. Thomas might write in response to a letter, she certainly would not come to Scotland. And after her months of absence from London, Cecil feared that she could not make her long silence intelligible to Mrs. Thomas in a letter, and that her missive might meet with no response.

She thought of Lady Trevor, but she believed that the widow had become long since the wife of Lord Glenham, and she shrank from an appeal to the supposed wife of the man she still loved with her entire soul.

To whom else could she write? Her heart sunk within her.

Old Gretchen went over the same ground in her own mind. She thought of Mrs. Thomas, of Lady Trevor, and of Mr. Pulford. And then, with a great sigh of relief, she thought of Maldred Crafton.

He loved her young mistress; he would hasten to her relief and protection. Her face glowed; her eyes shone.

"I have thought of a friend who will corroborate our words," she exclaimed, "and, more than that, who will come here and take us away. Give me pen and paper, and I'll write the letter now."

"It shall be sent to post i' the mornin'," said MacDougal. "The weekly post leaves here the morrow."

Mrs. MacDougal brought writing materials, and Gretchen sat down to engage in the laborious task of writing her letter.

"Are you writing to Lord Glenham, Gretchen?" asked Cecil, in German, her face flushing.

"No, indeed. I would not write to the false lover," responded the old woman, indignantly, "but to the true lover, who stood by us in sorrow and trouble, and offered you an honorable marriage and a splendid home when you were alone and friendless. I will write to Mr. Crafton!"

Cecil made no objection, and Gretchen spelled out her words carefully, writing in her own language, and giving an account of their adventures since leaving their lodgings in London. She begged Mr. Crafton to hasten to the rescue of her young mistress, stating her fears lest Mr. MacDougal should be won to deliver them up to Jarvis, in case of any delay. The letter finished, she signed, sealed and addressed it.

MacDougal deposited the letter on a wooden shelf, repeating the assurance that it should go on the morrow with the weekly post.

"An' now," said Mrs. MacDougal, "ye are quite safe till ye can hear frae yer ain friends. The man Jairvis, if he coom, will be obleeged to wait. Ye hae Willum's word. Now, coom to your chamber. The bed is ready, and the young lady is vera weak an' ill!"

She took up a candle and moved towards the door. Cecil attempted to rise, but her head swam with sudden giddiness, and a faintness seized upon her, compelling her to fall back on her pillow. The farmer, seeing her weakness, picked her up in his arms as if she had been a child, and followed in the wake of his wife and Gretchen.

They ascended a bare, wooden flight of steps to the second floor. Mrs. MacDougal led the way to the front chamber.

It was large, with a sloping roof, and with two dormer windows. The floor was bare, but spotlessly clean. A great, four-post bedstead, with a home-made rug on either side of it, occupied the centre of the room. A fire of pine cones and branches on the hearth diffused a delightful warmth and fragrance through the chamber, the night being chilly enough to require it.

Mrs. MacDougal officiated as tiring-woman to her exhausted chief guest. She unfastened the heavy garments Cecil had not laid aside for days, and brought her a night-robe of homespun linen which smelled of lavender, and helped her into the high bed with its snowy, lavendered sheets above billows of sweet and elastic feathers. Gretchen undressed herself and crept into the same bed, at the desire of her young mistress.

Then the farmer's wife brought to them two bowls of wine posset, steaming hot, and urged them to drink. They obeyed, draining the bowls, and she stole out with soft step, leaving them to their slumbers.

"One thing I'm sure of," was Gretchen's last thought, as she drifted into sleep, "and that is that Mr. Crafton will come to us—and that Miss Cecil will marry him! After all this trouble, with a deadly enemy seeking her destruction, she will marry him in very gratitude and to assure her safety!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. PETERS GAINS A CLEW.

Lady Trevor returned home from her drive in the park in a sullen rage. Her hatred of Mr. Pulford was intensified to positive abhorrence. She hurried up the steps of her house, disdaining his assistance, and he, cool and smiling, followed after her, quite with the air of master of the house.

"You will have to excuse me," she said, pausing in the hall. "I must dress for dinner."

"No apologies are necessary between you and me, Edith," responded Mr. Pulford, in his blandest tones. "But, as you remind me, I will go and dress for dinner also and return by the time you are ready."

He raised his hat, and tripped lightly down the steps again into the street.

Lady Trevor gazed after him with a malevolence in which was expressed all the evil of which her soul was capable. Then, her hand clutching the phials in her bosom, she slowly ascended the stair to her own rooms.

"He will dine with me to-day," she thought as she

entered her boudoir. "Oh, if I dared administer this poison in his wine! If opportunity offers, I will do it. I will free myself from his claims at the earliest possible moment. I will never marry him, placing myself and my fortune in his hands. I shall watch my opportunity—if that opportunity comes to-day, so much the worse for him and the better for me!"

Her maid came from an inner room to attend upon her. Lady Trevor flung off her bonnet and lay down upon a sofa, dismissing her servant. Her thoughts were very dark and sullen.

"I've had my own way all my life," she said to herself, "regardless of every one, and I'll have it still. I married Sir Albert Trevor in defiance of the wishes of my father and grandfather. With Sir Albert's help, I won the great wealth of my step-mother. I have swept this Cecil Rosse from my path. I shall sweep Horace Pulford aside just as easily."

Her thoughts settled upon Cecil Rosse.

"If only the girl were dead all would be safe!" she mused. "Pulford says that she can be kept up in that old haunted house in perfect safety until she dies of old age. While she lives I may have need of him. Perhaps I had better urge Pulford to destroy her before our marriage, and when that destruction is safely accomplished, and she no longer lives, I can get rid of him. I have need to be prudent. If I give him this poison to-day, I may have need of his services to-morrow. I must not be too precipitate or rash. With this subtle weapon in

my hands, I can put him out of my way at almost any moment."

As she thus reflected, she decided to bear all the annoyances consequent upon her engagement of marriage a little longer before depriving herself forever of Pulford's valuable services.

Her cheeks burned as her thoughts turned to Lord Glenham, but she had by no means given up all hope of becoming his wife. If Pulford were dead, she could make such excuses for her engagement to him to the Countess of Glenham as would go far to reinstate her in that lady's confidence and good graces.

"I shall win yet!" she assured herself. The prospect looks a little dark now, I admit, but with Cecil Rosse and Pulford dead, with Lady Glenham on my side, with the memory of my avowal in his generous heart, Gordon will yet turn to me with affection and ask me to become his wife. I can wait. All will come out right yet."

With recovered spirits she arose and passed into her dressing-room. She had decided not to put her murderous plans against Pulford into action just yet, but to carry matters with a high hand, to show herself in society as heretofore, and even, if necessary, to acknowledge her engagement.

"I shall go to the theatre to-night, Cerise," she exclaimed. "I require one of my prettiest toilets."

The Frenchwoman attired her mistress with scrupulous skill and care in a robe of pearl-colored silk and maroon velvet—a French creation—with a heart-shaped bodice filled in with point lace, and

with elbow-sleeves, edged with lace frills. With a costly parure of diamonds, with an artificial rose-flush on her cheeks and lips, an artificial shadow under her hard, black eyes, with an animation born of new schemes and reviving hopes, Lady Trevor looked unusually handsome as she descended at length, to the drawing-room.

Mr. Pulford was there in waiting for her.

He arose and stepped forward to greet her. He knew her hardness, her unscrupulous nature, her capabilities for wickedness; he delighted to humble her pride, to sting her soul in the ways he so well knew, in return for her treatment of him, but, nevertheless, as much as he was capable of loving, he loved her. He admired her; he sympathized with her boldness and hardness; yet, after all, what he most admired and longed to possess was her immense fortune. Next to that, he coveted her position in society; he desired to ally himself through her to a great and powerful family. His avarice and ambition alike interested, he was glad to see that she had changed her mood, and was now as smiling and pleasant as she had been before bitter and defiant.

He suited his mood to hers.

"Your drive did you good, Edith," he said, pleasantly. "Have you remembered my invitation for this evening? I have a box at the Prince of Wales theatre."

"I have remembered. I will go!" was the gracious response.

Her amiability struck her suitor as treacherous.

He watched her narrowly thereafter throughout the evening.

Dinner was announced. Mr. Pulford gave Lady Trevor his arm and led her in to dinner. They lingered at the table over the dessert, and finally returned to the drawing-room.

"The carriage is waiting," said Mr. Pulford. "We shall arrive at the beginning of the second act; early enough, I dare say; yet I think we ought now to be going."

The widow assented, and ordered her opera cloak—the one poor Cecil had wrought—and followed her suitor to the carriage.

As they went down the marble steps they met a woman ascending them.

This woman was Sarah Peters.

In the light that streamed through the open doorway, Lady Trevor saw that the woman had a sickly countenance and a shabby gown, and that she had the look of one upon a begging excursion. The lady did not recognize her, and drew her silken train aside as if she feared contamination, and swept on.

Mrs. Peters turned and followed her to the carriage.

"Lady Trevor," she began, in a whining sort of voice. "My lady—"

Mr. Pulford pushed the woman aside rudely.

"Off with you, you beggar," he exclaimed, "or I'll have you arrested!"

"Lady Trevor!" repeated the woman, desperately. "I must speak to you—"

Mr. Pulford slammed the door, and the carriage rolled swiftly away.

"I ought to have waited till morning," the woman muttered, gazing after it. "But I was too impatient. I'll come again to-morrow, and I won't be pushed aside then, I'll warrant. Being I'm here, I might as well find out what I can."

She hurried up the steps just as the hall-porter was about to close the door.

"If you please, sir," said she, respectfully, interposing her person in the doorway, "was that Lady Trevor who just went out?"

"It was," was the response. "You'd better be off, my good woman. No beggars allowed at this door."

"I am not a beggar. I was a respectable servant once, and am a seamstress now," replied Mrs. Peters. "I thought perhaps I could get a place in this great house."

"No servants are engaged here except through the usual channels," said the hall-porter, pompously. "You'd better apply in some tradesman's family."

Mrs. Peters did not offer to retreat. The man, through sheer love of gossip, allowed her to remain on the threshold, and quite enjoyed her amazement as her gaze took in the magnificence of the hall and its adornments.

"This Lady Trevor must be immensely rich," she ejaculated.

"Immensely," was the answer, given with a pride that showed that the hall-porter even felt the reflected glory of his mistress' grandeur. "You

LADY TREVOR SHUDDERED AT CRAFTON'S THREAT.—*See Page* 170.

see I was right. You ought to try for a place out of the aristocracy."

"And Lady Trevor has only one child to inherit all this wealth?" asked Mrs. Peters.

"She has none. She never had any. You are mistaken—"

The butler's gruff voice was heard at this juncture ordering the hall-porter to close the door. Mrs. Peters retreated abruptly, and the door was closed.

"She has no child," mused the woman, slowly descending the steps. "That I can understand. She never had one? That is singular. What did she do with the one she had in Germany? There's some mystery in this. Didn't she adopt that one, after all? I intend to know, and I ought to make inquiries before I call again."

She paused before the area-way, half tempted to descend. Then she walked slowly on.

She had not gone more than a few yards when she suddenly encountered the nurse she had seen in Hyde Park that afternoon. The nurse uttered a cry of surprise at this second encounter.

"Whatever are you doing here at the West End, Sarah Peters?" she demanded.

"And what are you doing out at this hour?" retorted the seamstress.

"I live near here. I've been out for an hour or two, as it's my evening out. But you don't belong in this direction, Sarah Peters. I do believe as you're looking up Lady Trevor, after all I said to you, too. Look out you don't get into some trouble."

"I shan't do that. I don't want nothing of Lady

Trevor, especially as you say she never had a child," said Mrs. Peters, artfully. "You know all about the aristocracy—I wish I did. Next to being one on 'em is to know all about 'em."

"That is so!" assented the nurse. "All these great families have their troubles like poorer ones. Why, even this great Marquis of St. Leonards, Lady Trevor's grandfather, has had his share of grief, and plenty of it came through Lady Trevor, they say."

"How?" asked Mrs. Peters, eagerly.

"I don't mind telling," said the nurse, as they walked slowly on together, arm in arm, "especially as its no secret. The Marquis of St. Leonards had a son he loved to distraction. His son was called Lord Harry Ravendale. He, the son, fell in love with a low sort of woman and his father cast him off. The low wife, a regular scheming creature, lived only a year after the marriage and died, leaving one child, Lady Edith Ravendale, now Lady Trevor!"

"How interesting it sounds!" said Mrs. Peters. "Especially as you tell it!"

The nurse, flattered, continued:

"When Lady Edith was nearly a young lady, Lord Harry Ravendale married a second time. His wife was an orphan, of a great family, and one of the biggest heiresses of the day. The marquis loved her as if she'd been his daughter. From this second marriage one child was born, a girl, who was called the Lady Alba. This child became the marquis' idol. About that time Lady Edith took it into her head to elope with Sir Albert Trevor, one

of the worst men that ever lived. After that, Lord Harry and his young wife and little child, went to Italy for the wife's health. She had consumption, I believe. And Lord Harry took the Roman fever, or some other disease, and died there."

"I don't see how this concerns Lady Trevor," said Mrs. Peters.

"You don't? Well, I'll tell you. After Lord Harry died his widow sent for Lady Trevor to come to her. And Lady Trevor and her husband went. Lord Harry's wife died of consumption abroad and left her child to Lady Trevor's care, telling her to bring the child back to its grandfather. But she did not do that. She stayed away months. And when the marquis sent after the child they found it was dying. They brought the little body home and buried it, and for fifteen years Lord St. Leonards never forgave nor spoke to his granddaughter. Lor, every one knows of the estrangement between them."

"How long ago did this happen?"

"Fifteen years."

"And the little step-sister, Lady Alba, died?"

"Yes. She was three years old at the time. They say that when her body was brought home, the doctors said the child had died of marasmus!"

Mrs. Peters started.

"Some folks said that the little Lady Alba had been ill-treated, and had died of neglect," said the gossipy nurse. "People will talk, you know, when a million of money is involved."

"A million of money?"

"Yes. The little Lady Alba inherited that amount from her mother, and by the mother's will the money went to Lady Trevor at the child's death. That's where she got all her wealth. Sir Albert was as poor as a church mouse, having wasted his own inheritance. You see, I know a great deal about these noble families, Sarah Peters. I could tell you things—but my time's up. I must go in, or I'll catch it from the head nurse. Good night!"

She darted away as a clock somewhere in the vicinity struck the hour, and Mrs. Peters was left to herself.

"Let me think it out," the woman muttered. "I've got a clew at last to the mystery that puzzled me. I think I see my way to make my fortune!"

CHAPTER XV.

CLEARING THE WAY.

Lady Trevor and Mr. Pulford arrived at the theatre just after the commencement of the second act of the play. Many lorgnettes were leveled at the handsome widow, who bore the scrutiny with composure, employing her own lorgnette in a leisurely survey of the house. She seemed happy and self-sufficient, and the general belief of her friends was that she was making a "love-match" with the very satisfied and complacent-looking Mr. Pulford.

At the end of the second act several gentlemen, who had been among Lady Trevor's suiters, made the best of their defeat, and thronged in upon her.

She was very gracious to them all. She seemed in excellent spirits, and Mr. Pulford played the devoted lover to perfection.

As the music struck up, the group of visitors separated, several members of it withdrawing to seek their seats or to make other calls. They were replaced by others, among whom were Maldred Crafton.

His months of unavailing search for Cecil Rosse

had told upon the dark and saturnine visage of Crafton. He looked baffled, disappointed, troubled. He had a trick of starting at every sound. He was perpetually on the lookout for some trace of the lost girl or her servant. He never passed a slender, girlish figure in the street, or a clumsy old woman, but that he started with a thrill of hope that was invariably followed by a deeper and darker despair. He did not relax his efforts in any degree. He called at Queen's Crescent regularly to inquire if Mrs. Thomas had received news. He was more intimate than ever with Lord Glenham so that if the earl had found a clew to the lost ones, he would have been informed of it nearly as soon as his lordship.

He had visited the theatre upon this night through sheer restlessness. Like most of Lady Trevor's acquaintances, he had heard the rumors of her matrimonial intentions, and now hastened to congratulate Mr Pulford, and to offer her ladyship his best wishes for her future happiness.

"You do not look very happy yourself, Mr. Crafton," remarked Lady Trevor, regarding keenly his dark, thin face. "You are grown a very shadow during these past few months. Are you still mourning for Miss Rosse?"

"I am still searching for her," replied Mr. Crafton, quietly.

"Your search is hopeless, believe me," said the widow, with a shade more of earnestness in her voice than she knew. "Miss Rosse will never be found!"

Crafton's gaze became a little more keen; something of eagerness crept into his manner.

"Have you heard something?" he asked.

"No," replied Lady Trevor, coolly. "How could I hear anything? Do you think that, after breaking her engagement to me, Miss Rosse could write to me at this late day? I judge from the long silence of months. Detective officers have searched all Europe for her; you and Lord Glenham and the Marquis of St. Leonards, my grandfather, have worked without ceasing, tracing every possible clew to its beginning. You have not found her—you never will find her. The failure of these months is symbolic of the failure of years. She is gone beyond any one's finding. It is one of those tragic disappearances we read about now and then with a chill creeping of the flesh. I believe that she is dead. If she were living some trace of her must have been found before this."

"I cannot believe that she is dead!" said Crafton. "I will not believe it. It is incredible that she and Gretchen could both die so suddenly and leave no trace. Had they perished by some accident, their bodies would have been found."

"Do you know, Mr. Crafton," said Lady Trevor, in a tone too low for other ears than those for which her words were intended. "I have always had my suspicions of that cabman who took Miss Rosse and her servant from my house? It is certainly singular that he never replied to any of the advertisements for him, that he never made application for the reward offered for his discovery, and that,

although you have applied again and again to the proprietors of cab-stands, that particular man could never be found!"

Lady Trevor knew very well that the cabman in question had been advertised for as having carried a young lady and her servant to Euston Square station—a sufficient reason why he had not declared himself, as he had in reality transported Miss Rosse to Gravesend.

"You think that the cabman may have murdered Miss Rosse and her servant?" asked Crafton.

"I don't know what I think. But, certainly the cabman's silence is very mysterious. And the fact is proven that Miss Rosse never arrived at Euston Square. Whether she changed her mind on the way and went elsewhere, or whether he took her to some house, or murdered her in his vehicle, I have no idea. You know more of the dark ways of lower-class London than I, Mr. Crafton, and ought to be able to form some idea approximating to the truth."

Some one addressed Lady Trevor at this moment and she turned from Crafton, smiling and gracious. He regarded her with a lingering furtive glance. He had known of her love for Lord Glenham, and had at the first suspected her of having removed Miss Rosse from London through motives of jealousy. These suspicions that had been lulled for a time now recurred to him with singular force. Could Lady Trevor have sent Miss Rosse away? It did not seem possible, the more especially as the widow was now engaged to be married to Mr. Pulford.

"Yet she does not love Pulford," mused Crafton,

studying her, "and I know that she does love Glenham with all her soul. There is some mystery about this sudden engagement of hers, else she accepts Pulford in sheer despair of ever winning Lord Glenham. Under all that suavity and sweetness, it appears to me that Mr. Pulford holds my lady in his power, and that she stands in terror of him. He is not a man to win her love, even though she had not loved Lord Glenham. She is ambitious, yet he is her inferior in rank and fortune. She desires to win Lord St. Leonard's favor; this marriage will alienate her grandfather from her utterly. She might marry a title and fortune—what can be the secret of her taking up with her business agent? There's something wrong in the affair. If I were not so occupied with the mystery of Miss Rosse's fate, I would devote some attention to this."

The music ceased; the curtain rose, and Lady Trevor's visitors departed, all except Maldred Crafton. He took possession of a chair in the shadow of one of the silken curtains, and kept up a low-voiced conversation with the widow, Mr. Pulford keeping his eyes fixed on the stage and his ears open to the words of his companions.

"You ought to get married, Mr. Crafton," said Lady Trevor, playfully. "Celibacy is going out of fashion. There's a charming young lady in the opposite box—Miss Mandell, you know. Why don't you turn your thoughts in that direction, instead of mourning for a girl so greatly your inferior in rank as Miss Rosse?"

"I can't shift my affections about from object to

object with the celerity you seem to suppose," replied Crafton. "With me to love once is to love forever."

Lady Trevor fancied a hidden meaning in his words—a sort of implied reproach to herself—and flushed hotly under her rouge and powder.

"You forget," she said, "that Miss Rosse loves Lord Glenham. If you should find her, she might not marry you."

"We have no right to suppose her in love with the earl, since she was not engaged to marry him. I do not despair of finding Miss Rosse, nor of winning her to be my wife. Whatever the mystery of her fate, I shall yet solve it. There has been foul play somewhere; of that I am sure. And woe betide those who have been concerned in it when I discover them!" added Crafton, speaking with sudden fury, through his clenched teeth, and looking with menace and suspicion into the hard, black eyes of the widow. "Whoever has harmed that innocent girl shall suffer a frightful retribution! I swear it!"

Lady Trevor shuddered. Crafton saw that her eyes blenched, and that, in spite of a manifest effort at self-control, a look of swift alarm sprang into them.

"You are tragic!" remarked Mr. Pulford, quietly, turning around. "Did no one ever suspect before that you had a turn for melodrama, Mr. Crafton? As to Miss Rosse, whether she be found or not, can matter very little to Lady Trevor. An embroidress more or less to the world can't matter. Suppose we pay a little attention to the stage for a change."

He resumed his contemplation of the leading actress. Lady Trevor followed his example, plying her lace fan with Spanish grace. Mr. Crafton assumed a meditative attitude and watched her closely. That look of alarm, the sudden blenching of her gaze, had done much to strengthen his reviving suspicions of her.

"Can it be that Lady Trevor is at the bottom of Miss Rosse's disappearance?" he asked himself. "It looks as if it might be so. And yet what cause could she have had for getting her out of the way except jealousy? Would jealousy be a sufficient reason? Lady Trevor is engaged to marry Pulford. Could her love for Glenham have been deep enough to impel her to a crime to win him?"

He pondered the question seriously. At the end of the third act he made his adieux and withdrew to his own seat.

Then, as Lady Trevor and he were alone together, Mr. Pulford said quietly, in a tone scarcely above a whisper:

"Be more upon your guard, Edith. If Mr. Crafton had been a little sharper-sighted, he must inevitably have suspected something wrong from your manner while he was talking. With all your coolness and hardihood you are only a woman, after all."

"It is impossible that Mr. Crafton should get upon the right track," whispered Lady Trevor, with a shade of anxiety.

"Perfectly so," replied Mr. Pulford, easily.

"And yet I feel a strange uneasiness," murmured

the widow, in a troubled voice. "I wish that the girl were dead and buried. Then I would be free from these haunting fears—then I could enjoy my life and my fortune. If she were only dead!"

"She is the same as dead!"

"Yet not the same, for, as she is now, there is always a possibility of resurrection. Mr. Crafton will never give over the search while he lives, and some accident may place in his hands a clew which might possibly lead to a discovery. And there is always a possibility that those creatures might betray you for money."

"Not much. They would not dare."

"Yet," repeated the widow, persistently. "I wish the girl were dead!"

The significance in her tone was a revelation to Mr. Pulford. Both sat silent for a brief period apparently absorbed in listening to the music now thrilling the air of the auditorium. But presently, under cover of her fan, Lady Trevor, in a subtle whisper that barely reached the sharpened hearing of her companion, again gave utterance to her misgivings.

"Those people, you say, are perfectly unscrupulous," she said. "Why do you allow them to keep the girl a prisoner when she might be put out of the way at once? They fear you; they would do anything for money. Why not hire them to kill the girl?"

"You are making swift progress," returned Mr. Pulford, in a similar whisper. "Six months ago you scouted the very idea of murder. And now

you urge me to commit one—yes, two—for if the girl dies the old woman must also."

"I have heard that there is no standing still in this life," replied Lady Trevor. "One must go upward or downward. And I, having begun, must keep on in the path I am treading. There is no turning back for me. Let them both die, girl and old woman, so that I am safe."

Mr. Pulford smiled evilly.

"You have got rid of your earlier scruples," he muttered, "so I may as well tell you that I expect every day to hear of the two deaths for which you are so anxious. I told Jarvis and the others that I would pay them handsome sums of money outright on proofs of those deaths, or if they continued to play jailer, I'd pay them an annuity. Jarvis and his wife are London-bred. They won't be likely to remain in that Highland solitude much longer. The Portuguese woman will think of her own country and be willing to do anything to return to it. The snows and winds, the awful cold, and the more awful loneliness, will drive the three wretches to desperation. I expect them in London any day with proofs of the girl's death."

Lady Trevor drew a breath of relief.

"You have planned well," she replied. "I have got rid of my old scruples against taking life. If I had been rid of them fifteen years ago, I should have been a happier woman to-day. I often wish now that I had let Sir Albert have his own way, but the mistake I made then you will soon repair. I wish you could send orders to Jarvis to hurry up—"

"Impossible. He could not be reached by mail or telegraph, and I dare not send a special messenger to him. No, no, Edith, we must be patient. If we hear no news from Scotland this summer, be sure that before another winter comes on the Jarvises and the Portuguese woman will fly southward, leaving all encumbrances behind them. One winter on that desolate coast is enough for them, rest assured."

Lady Trevor became thoughtful and silent.

She had determined to rid herself of Pulford and his claims before the arrival of the day he had appointed for their marriage. But she desired to have Cecil Rosse destroyed first. She felt herself unable to cope with the Jarvises and the Portuguese woman, who had not seen her, and whom she desired not to meet. She would stimulate Pulford to commit the hideous double crime she desired, and then she would destroy him ruthlessly.

She called all her cunning to her aid and tried to devise some plan by which to bring about the ends she desired.

The curtain rose, and the "mimic life" upon the stage proceeded with its representation. Both Lady Trevor and Mr. Pulford watched the scene with attentive eyes, but with minds far away. Neither again alluded to the subject that employed the thoughts of both. They sat out the play, and re-entered the carriage and returned to South Audley street. Mr. Pulford gave his arm to the lady, assisting her up the steps.

"Come into the drawing-room," said the widow, graciously. "I have more to say to you."

Mr. Pulford followed her into the drawing-room. She led the way to a far corner, quite out of the hearing of possible eavesdroppers, and plunged at once into the subject she had at heart.

"I have made up my mind to our marriage, Horace," she said, graciously. "But I am not willing to marry while I have this worse than sword of Damocles suspended above my head. These people have been up at that old house for seven months or so. You have not heard from them during that period. They may all be dead. Something may have happened. There is no one you can send to look after matters there. Now, why shouldn't you go up there yourself?"

Mr. Pulford started.

"If you go," continued the widow, "you can urge Jarvis to put an end to the imprisonment in the way I desire. You can learn how well your instructions have been carried out. You can—"

"I am tempted to act upon your suggestion, Edith. The Jarvises really do need looking after," interrupted Pulford. "I might go in the yacht, but my visit must be secret. I can journey by rail to Inverness, and take the remainder of the trip on horseback. It will be a hard journey—"

"But it will make everything safe."

"I believe I'll go," said Pulford, falling into the trap she had laid for him. "I'll start to-morrow. The sooner I go, the sooner I shall return. I shall have to make the journey under pretence of visiting

Greycourt. There are so many on the watch that some hostile eye may chance to be directed to my movements, therefore I shall be on my guard."

They discussed their plans for an hour or more and then Mr. Pulford, quite resolved to start for Scotland on the morrow, arose to take his leave.

"You will not hear from me until I return, Edith," he said. "Be very cautious. Go on with your preparations for the wedding. And now good-by."

He put his arm around her and kissed her, smiling maliciously as he saw that she shrank from him involuntarily in aversion.

"You had better employ my absence in studying submission to your fate," he remarked, coolly. "I am not a man to stand that sort of nonsense, Edith. If you have any consideration for your future welfare, you will cultivate a becoming regard for me without delay."

He kissed her again, and she forced herself to receive the caress with a good grace. Then he took his leave.

"I have played that game pretty well," thought Lady Trevor, exultantly. "He will get rid of the girl, just as I planned. Then I will get rid of him. My difficulties are smoothing out one by one. I shall have everything my own way yet."

And in high good humor, she glided up the broad stair to her own room.

She would scarcely have been so much at her ease if she had known of the trial in store for her on the morrow—of the intended visit of the supposed beg-

gar she had seen that evening on her steps with sickly face and shabby gown—of fate launching itself upon her in her smiling prosperity in the shape of Sarah Peters.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OPPORTUNE APPEARANCE.

When morning came—the morning after her arrival with Gretchen at the MacDougal farm-house—Cecil Rosse found herself unable to leave her bed. The exposures of the last few days, the over-exertion attendant upon her long flight, the chill and hardship, the terrible anxieties, added to the imprisonment and terrors that had preceded them, had been too much for the young girl, who had been so carefully nurtured and tenderly cherished in the old pastor's house in the Black Forest.

She found herself weak as an infant, racked with pains, and burning with a low, nervous fever. Her pulse was high and fierce, her eyes glowed like suns, but her mind was clear as ever, and even more than usually active.

"I can't get up, Gretchen," she said, trying to speak bravely. "I fear that I am ill!"

The old woman's frightened visage reflected the fear. She arose at once, paying no heed to the rheumatic pains assailing her own tired body, dressed herself, and descended to the kitchen.

The family had long since risen and was hard at work. Gretchen's letter to Mr. Crafton had already been conveyed to the post. A great fire was burning on the kitchen hearth, and Mrs. MacDougal was employed before it in some household task. She looked up, flushed with heat, smiling pleasantly as anxious Gretchen came in.

"Good morning," she said, politely. "I hope you restit well, and the young lady?"

"Very well, thank you; but my young mistress is ill," replied Gretchen. "She has a high fever. Is there a doctor near?"

"There is nay dochther within thirty miles, woman," answered Mrs. MacDougal. "But every woman in these pairts kens vera well how to treat ordinary diseases. I was aboot to prepare your parritch, thinking ye'd soon be up. But I'll see your young lady before I get your breakfast. Elspeth!" she cried, raising her voice. "Elspeth!"

Her elder daughter made her appearance.

"Watch the parritch that it dinna burn," commanded the housewife. "The young lady is ill. Now, woman, we'll gae till her."

Mrs. MacDougal and Gretchen returned to the upper room.

The former shook her head at sight of the small, flushed face on the white pillow, at the two lustrous, restless eyes, at the tender mouth, drawn with pain, and at the general air of helplessness. She felt Cecil's pulse, questioned her as to her sensations, and said, with a look of relief:

"The puir young creature is worn oot, and is

feverish frae exhaustion. Simple remedies and plenty of rest are better in this case than a dochther with potions and bitter draughts. Trust to me, young lady. I'll bring ye oot o' this, only, I warn ye baith, ye'll not be gettin' up for a week or twa yet, Miss. By the time your frien' fra Lunnun cooms here ye'll be oop, I hope, and ready to see him."

Cecil smiled gratefully.

"Will she be safe here for a week or two, madam?" asked old Gretchen. "Mr. Jarvis will surely appear here before that time, and your husband may—"

"My husband will do as he hae said," interrupted Mrs. MacDougal. "We Hielan' people ken naething o' faus Southern ways. If the man Jarvis coom, he maun wait till your frien' hae a chance also to appear. Your letter is gane, so rest content, woman, and dinna disturb the mind o' your young mistress. She must hae quiet, ye understand."

Gretchen assented. She had also considerable knowledge of ordinary diseases and simple remedies, like most elderly women in places remote from towns and resident physicians, and she was also an excellent nurse. Combining her wisdom with that of Mrs. MacDougal, the two began their quiet cour se of treatment immediately. Hot teas were administered to the patient, extra bedclothing was piled above her, and a great fire was kindled on the hearth, filling the room with warmth and delicious pine odors.

When night came, the racking pains had left Cecil, but she was far weaker than before, and so tired

that she dropped into a slumber so long and so profound as to fill Gretchen with new alarm.

The day had passed without incident. The next day, however, was not to be eventless.

Cecil awakened free from fever and complaining only of languor. Her nurses would not permit her to rise. Elspeth brought her a bowl of hot spiced drink and a tempting breakfast. Mrs. MacDougal was constant and tender in her ministrations. The gentle, uncomplaining girl, so grateful for her kindness, had won the housewife's heart.

At noon, according to custom, the family gathered around the dinner-table, in the roomy old kitchen. They were half through the meal when the loud barking of dogs in the yard, and the sound of a horse's hoofs, announced an arrival.

The farmer arose and went to the door.

A man had just ridden up on a lame pony, and was in the act of dismounting when MacDougal appeared upon the threshold.

The man was Jarvis.

Uncombed, haggard, wild in his appearance, Miss Rosse's enemy looked as formidable as a gaunt and hungry wolf that has been cheated of his prey. His small eyes glared about him suspiciously. He moved stiffly toward the door, raising his hat, his gait and carriage betraying his fatigue. His manner was full of eagerness. He believed that he should find the objects of his search at this house, or in the hamlet hard by. Judging by his own exhaustion, he did not believe that Cecil or Gretchen

could have yet continued their journey beyond this point.

"Good-day, sir," he said, politely raising his hat. "My name is Graham—Doctor Graham—"

"And mine is MacDougal," interrupted the Highlander. "Willum MacDougal."

"I have traveled hard and far," said Jarvis, sniffing at the savory odors that came from the kitchen. "My beast is gone lame, and I am myself used up. If you will give me a good dinner, I will pay well for it."

"The MacDougals never turned ane, gentle or simple, frae their dure," responded the farmer, proudly. "Ye're welcome, mon, to the bite and sup ye wad hae. Coom in! Coom in!"

He retreated into the room, making place for Jarvis, who followed him.

"Here's a docther, mither," he announced to the housewife, who had risen. "Ye were wanting a docther, ye ken, and here he is."

Jarvis made a bow, and exclaimed:

"Yet, I am a doctor, but perhaps not the kind you want, if any of your family is ill. I doctor the mind, not the body. I keep a retreat for the insane at Incledon, on the west coast."

"A mad-docther!" ejaculated Elspeth.

"Just so, Miss," said Jarvis. "I have twenty patients at my retreat, but two of them escaped a few days ago and I am in search of them. I am very much afraid they will perish among the hills, if they have not already. Have you seen anything of two wandering women, on ponies without saddles—

one of the women being a girl as pretty as a pictur', with a kind of sorrowful face, and the other an old foreign woman ?" he asked.

Mrs. MacDougal's countenance betrayed her knowledge of the women in question.

"Ye are the mon Jairvis, I doot not," she exclaimed. "But ye'll not get the lassie nor yet the auld woman, mind that."

"Hoot, wife," said MacDougal, more cautious than his spouse. "We'll hearken to baith sides, like the righteous joodge. "Are ye the mon Jairvis ?" he asked abruptly, turning to his visitor.

"I never heard the name before," replied Jarvis. "I am Doctor Graham. I see you have seen them runaways. I knows their stories and tricks. The girl especially would deceive a saint. P'raps your good lady, Mr. MacDougal, means to take up for them poor lunatics. I hopes you will weigh well what you do. If you detain a crazy person—let alone two on 'em—from their lawful guardians and keepers, the law will punish you severely."

"We hae nay intention of detaining loonatics frae their lawfu' keepers and guardeens," responded MacDougal, bewildered and not knowing what to believe, yet desirous of being upon the side of the law. "The lassie and the auld woman are in this hoose at this very minute—"

"Here ?" interrupted Jarvis, his eyes flashing.

"Here," repeated MacDougal. "They tell ane story, ye tell anither. Who can decide between ye ?"

"You can call a jury of your neighbors," said Jarvis, eagerly. "Let them decide."

"There'll be nay jury the day," interrupted Mrs. MacDougal, with spirit. "The lassie lies in bed oop-stair, not able to rise hersel. She'll nay be movin' for a week yet. And we hae promised to gie her a chance to prove her words, and Willum MacDougal will ne'er go back o' his word. The lassie and the auld woman shall be protectit in this hoose until they can hear frae their friends. Ye maun be Docther Graham and not the mon Jairvis; they maun be loonatics and not what we hae taken them for; but they hae our word, and they shall hae our protection until they can hear frae Lunnon."

This declaration appeared to meet with the approval of the entire household with the exception of its head. The farmer, with more than his share of caution, did not wish to offend this stranger, whose tale might be true, nor did he wish to render himself liable to the penalty of the law. Yet, having a wholesome awe of the "gudewife," who could certainly render him extremely uncomfortable if she so desired, he resolved to temporize.

"We dinna doot ye, mon!" he said, prudently. "If I hadna gi'ed my word I'd gie the women up to ye. But surely ye can prove what ye say. The vera friends of these women maun confairm your statements. Sae, when the friends coom—"

Jarvis had been completely overcome by the possibilities thus hinted at.

"Do you mean," he gasped, growing pale, "that the girl has writted to London?"

"Aye," was the farmer's response. "It's a' the same. The old woman wrote, and the letter went in the mail to-day. If their friends coom for them, Dochther, ye can settle 't wi' them."

Jarvis looked blank at this suggestion.

If Cecil or Gretchen had written to London ruin certainly stared him in the face. The police were looking for him in the metropolis on account of some crime he had committed. If the prisoners escaped him, Pulford would refuse to pay him, the police would pursue and capture him, and instead of realizing the airy dreams he had lately cherished, he would be sent to prison.

Notwithstanding his dismay and terror, he maintained a calm exterior. He had some days before him. It would go hard with him if he did not outwit this obstinate Scot and his spirited wife, and carry out his nefarious project to its awful conclusion.

"I'll kill the girl and the old woman, and so shut their mouths," he thought, rapidly. "And then I'll go back to the coast, get the old woman and Maria, and take another route to Lunnon. Once there, I'll get my reward, hush up that charge against me, and begin life again!"

He called all his cunning to his aid.

"Your proposition seems fair enough, Mr. MacDougal," he exclaimed. "It will be a week before any one can arrive here from London. I am willing to wait to meet the friends of this young lady,

Miss Rosse. They will swear to what I've said. They'll tell you I'm an honest man, a doctor, and the keeper of a mad-house. They'll tell you that this young lady went mad for love, and that, while she seems all right in her mind, she's as dangerous as a mad dog. The old woman is more dangerous yet. I hope neither on 'em 'll harm your kind fam'ly, Mr. MacDougal. Yes, if Miss Rosse hadn't sent for her friends, I should have insisted on doing so !"

The farmer looked surprised. He leaned still more in his own mind toward the side of the pretended doctor.

"And now," said Jarvis, cheerfully, "while I wait here, what am I to do? I left my asylum in such a hurry, being the two women had run away, that I didn't bring no great sum of money with me. But I can pay for accommodations. Will you keep me until Miss Rosse's friends come and we can settle this here question?"

MacDougal was hospitable and would have esteemed himself wanting in the commonest virtues if he had refused to keep Jarvis, in addition to his other guests. The housewife, in her desire to thoroughly protect and comfort Cecil and her servant, would have sent the man to a neighbor, but a glance at her husband's face stifled her remonstrances.

"Hear baith sides," said MacDougal, keeping to his text. "Ye can stay, mon. If ye are honest and true, ye'll find friends here. But if ye are faus, I warn ye to leave now. We Hielan' men are rough toward scoundrels !"

Jarvis protested his good faith and good character.

"Ye can stay," said the Highlander. "Elspeth, lassie, lay anither dish. Sit down, mon, to the table!"

Jarvis obeyed the injunction and took his place at the table. The family resumed their seats, and the meal progressed.

It was nearly concluded when Gretchen entered the kitchen upon some trivial errand. Her amazement and terror at sight of Jarvis caused her to beat a precipitate retreat.

Mrs. MacDougal followed her up the stair and reiterated her promises of protection, and enjoined her to say nothing to Miss Rosse of Jarvis' presence in the house, since an alarm would retard her recovery.

Gretchen promised, but to attempt to maintain secrecy cost her a severe effort. She knew well that Jarvis would not quietly remain at the farmhouse to await the arrival of a man who would inevitably expose him as a villain. She knew that Jarvis must have some wicked plan in his mind, against which she must be on her guard.

That night Gretchen barricaded the door of her room. Somewhere about midnight she heard stealthy movements outside, and knew that her enemy was seeking admittance. Her sharp outcry, while it aroused no one else in the house, sent him skulking to his room, baffled and infuriated.

The week passed slowly. Cecil grew better with every day, and sat up for hours together in her own

room. Her recovery was very rapid, thanks to the elasticity of youth and a sound physical constitution. In a day or two more she expected to be able to resume her journey.

During these days Jarvis had watched for an opportunity to creep in upon the two women and silence their tongues forever. But Gretchen contrived to keep Elspeth MacDougal nearly always in Cecil's room, and he watched in vain.

The time was drawing near when the appearance of Miss Rosse's friend might be confidently expected at any moment.

"Ye'll not hae to wait much longer, Dochther," said MacDougal, one evening, just before the light dusk closed in upon the valley. "Miss Rosse's Lunnon friend should be here the morrow."

Jarvis arose and sauntered out of doors.

"To-morrow!" he repeated, darkly. "Then I have only to-night. I must do my work to-night!"

He walked along the country road, meditating, and revolving plans in his own mind.

Presently he paused. A horseman was coming at a swinging pace through the hamlet without stopping, apparently making for the hills beyond.

Jarvis stepped aside. The horseman was about to pass on, but changed his mind and drew rein abruptly.

"Can you tell me, my man, if the roads through the mountain passes are in good condition, and safe for night travel!" he asked, in a high, imperative voice.

Jarvis started in amaze, and came nearer, peering through the pale shadows at the horseman.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, jubilantly. "It's Mr. Pulford! Don't you know me, sir, Jarvis?—Jarvis, as you suppose is as Black Rock? You've come in the very nick of time! The devil himself must have sent you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PLOT WORKS.

The amazement of Pulford at the rencontre, which was as startling as it was unexpected, fully equalled that of Jarvis. He uttered an ejaculation expressive of utter bewilderment, and leaned from his horse, peering into the face of the ruffian with alarmed recognition.

"You here?" he exclaimed. "You?"

"It's really me, Gov'nor!" exclaimed Jarvis. "And I never was so glad to see any one in my life as I am to set eyes on you. The Old Nick himself must have sent you. And it's the first streak of luck I've had these two weeks!"

"Has anything happened?"

"Everything has happened. The fat is all in the fire. If you're on your way to Black Rock, you needn't go no further. I am here, and the gal is here—"

Mr. Pulford interrupted him by a malediction that would have startled any man less hardened than the scoundrel who listened to him. Then he hastily slipped from his saddle, demanding again what had happened.

"The girl here!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? Speak out, man!"

"That's what I am trying to do, sir. Miss Rosse and the old woman escaped from Black Rock. They are as cunning as Lucifer, that's what they are. And the trick they played on us, a-letting themselves down out of a three-story winder, was total unexpected, the dogs being hitched under the wagon at the time, ready for travel, and not, therefore, being around to hinder—"

"Escaped? The girl and her servant escaped? And here?"

"In that house over yonder," declared Jarvis, pointing toward the low thatched farmhouse of MacDougal. "She came here, and I came in pursuit. She's been here a week or more. I've tried every earthly means to get hold on 'em—"

Mr. Pulford uttered another fierce oath.

Then he questioned his confederate sharply and keenly. Jarvis replied by giving a full narrative of the occurrences of the past few weeks.

"I was just gettin' desprit, Guv'nor," he continued. "The gal has writ to some friend in London to come a'ter her, and her friend is expected here to-morrow. What I was to do I didn't know, only I meant to make a bold strike to-night."

"She expects a friend to-morrow! What friend?"

"You ought to know that better'n me. The friend is a man, of course, that's all I know."

Mr. Pulford reflected. He knew well that Miss Rosse had few acquaintances in London, and that

Gretchen must have appealed for help either to Lord Glenham or Maldred Crafton.

"You are right, Jarvis," he exclaimed. "The old Nick himself must have sent me up here at this particular time. We must make a bold strike to-night. To-morrow will be too late. I stopped over a day at Inverness, and Miss Rosse's friend may have been close upon my track. He may even arrive here to-night."

"He may, Guv'nor. Calculating close, he ought to have been here to-day."

Mr. Pulford again gave himself up to thought. His fertile brain presently originated a striking idea, which he hastened to impart to his companion.

"I'll ride on to the farmhouse," he said, "and present myself to the worthy MacDougal as Miss Rosse's expected friend from London."

"You, Gov'nor?"

"I. And I'll corroborate all your statements, Jarvis. The girl must be delivered up into your keeping."

Jarvis expressed assent.

"I came up here on purpose to put her out of the way altogether," said Pulford, in a lower tone. "As long as this girl lives she will be a source of danger and trouble to us. Even all your vigilance has not availed to keep her in the prison we provided for her. Now, suppose that she were to die to-night? I should hand you in the morning a roll of money, the reward I promised you, and you could go where you will, independent and well provided for."

"It'd be a good job for me, that's so. Only how's the thing to be did?"

Pulford replied by unfolding a diabolical plan, which met the full approval of his villainous ally.

"You've got a head for business, Guv'nor," said Jarvis, admiringly. "Jest make the thing a little plainer, and I'll undertake to carry it through."

They talked for some time further, developing Pulford's scheme in all its hideous details. Then Pulford remounted and rode on toward the farm-house, leaving Jarvis to follow later.

The MacDougal family was gathered in the great kitchen. A big fire blazed on the hearth, the night being chilly. Mrs. MacDougal sat at her spinning wheel, hard at work. Elspeth was winding yarn from a reel. The younger daughter was sewing, while the buxom housemaid was knitting stockings. Even the men were employed, in repairing harness and farm implements and all these employments were carried on by the firelight, aided by the glimmer of one tallow candle.

Mr. Pulford rode into the yard, dismounted, and knocked upon the door with the handle of his riding-whip. The farmer bade him enter, and he opened the door and stepped over the threshold.

His appearance declared him a gentleman. As he removed his hat, bowing, MacDougal and his family arose, greeting him respectfully.

"Is this the house of Mr. MacDougal?" asked Pulford.

MacDougal replied in the affirmative.

"I received a letter from Miss Rosse's servant,"

said Pulford, easily, "begging me to come to them—"

"An' ye're welcome, sir, right welcome," interrupted Mrs. MacDougal, impulsively. "We expected ye the day, sir. Elspeth, place a chair. Coom up to the fire, sir. Dinna stan' there by the dure."

"We're glad to see ye, sir," said the farmer. "The young lady were getting troubled wi' the waiting. This be gude news for her, puir young creetur'."

The family entertaining no doubt that this was the "friend" so anxiously expected by Miss Rosse, pressed their hospitalities upon the stranger. One of the men went out to care for his horse. Mr. Pulford sat down in a high-backed, rush-bottomed chair at the corner of the hearth, declining politely the offers of refreshment urged upon him.

"I had my supper at a farmhouse a few miles back," he declared. "I am too anxious about Miss Rosse to think of anything beside her. Is she well?"

"She hae been vera ill!" said Mrs. MacDougal. "Vera ill, sir, but thanks to a mercifu' Providence, she's aboot well now. I will tell her you've coom—"

"Not yet, if you please. I wish to ask you a few questions first, madam—"

"And I hae something to say, also," said the farmer, respectfully. "The young lady cam' here wi' her servant, without ony attendant whatever. The twa were mounted on ponies that were

exhausted wi' fatigue. The young lady fainted, an' I carried her intil the hoose in my arms. They had traveled lang an' far, puir souls. We made them comfortable, sir, an' welcome."

"Ay, that we did," said Mrs. MacDougal. "An' a gentler, sweeter lady never lived than Miss Rosse!"

"She told us," continued the farmer, "that she hae been confined for months in a auld haunted hoose ca'ed the Black Rock hoose, whilk belonged to the last o' the Cathcairns. An' she said that she had an enemy whilk was on her track. Sure enoo, the next day a mon appeared saying his name was Docther Graham, and the twa puir women were loony-patients escaped frae his mad-hoose at Incledon. Sae I hae listened to baith sides, an' not being able to joodge between the twa stories, I bade Docther Graham wait until I could hear fra Miss Rosse's friends. Miss Rosse says that the docther is no docther, but a mon named Jairvis. He has behavit vera well. We has seen nathing wrang in him."

"An' we hae seen nae madness in her," said Mrs. MacDougal.

"Yet the man's story is the true one," said Mr. Pulford, with a long-drawn sigh. "He must be Doctor Graham of Incledon, a peculiar but most estimable person."

"Then he is nae the mon Jairvis?"

"I never heard that name," said Mr. Pulford. "I know no such person. Miss Rosse is really insane. She was disappointed in love and went melancholy

mad, and her friends sent her to Incledon, thinking that the bracing air, the solitude, and excellent treatment, for which that retreat is celebrated, might restore her to health. As to the woman Gretchen, who shares her delusions, I know nothing about her. She is probably some patient who has attached herself to my poor niece—"

"Then the young lady is your niece, sir?"

Mr. Pulford bowed gravely.

"Of course," said he, "I was surprised to receive a letter from the German woman in regard to my young relative, but as I had heard from the senior doctor of the Incledon retreat, that Miss Rosse had escaped, I came on at once."

The MacDougals expressed their wonder and surprise at Pulford's declarations. Every member of the family had been so deeply impressed with the beauty and sweetness of Miss Rosse that they had instinctively espoused her cause against Jarvis. They did not dream of doubting Pulford's word. They believed him to be the friend Gretchen had summoned, and considered his testimony decisive.

They had not overcome the stupor produced by the stranger's unwelcome declarations when Jarvis came swaggering in.

He started at sight of Pulford, counterfeiting amazement. His employer arose and advanced toward him, stretching out his hand and exclaiming:

"Ah, Doctor, it is you, then? How do you do, sir? This is a most unpleasant surprise, seeing you here!"

"An unpleasant surprise to me, sir," said Jarvis, shaking the hand extended to him. "I fear you will deem me neglectful, sir, for allowin' the gal to get the start o' me in this here fashion."

"We certainly owe a great deal of gratitude to this worthy family, Doctor," said Pulford, "for their care of my poor niece, and their hospitality to yourself."

"Miss Rosse is oop an' dressed," said Mrs. MacDougal, completely bewildered. "Shall I ca' her, sir? Wad ye like to see her?"

"Not to-night, madam," said Pulford, who did not wish to see either Cecil or Gretchen at all. "I am fatigued, and would like to be spared the trial. But if you can kindly accommodate me for the night, I will see my poor niece in the morning, and then remove her from your hospitable roof."

"He is right," said the farmer. "Let the young lady pass a quiet night. An' i' the morning let her gae away peaceable. That is the best plan, wife. Ye can mak' oop a bed for the gentleman, nae doot?"

The housewife assented. She had already planned in her own mind to give up the chamber of her daughters to this stranger, and compel them to resort to a "shake-down" upon the kitchen floor. She was about to take Elspeth aside to communicate this decision, when old Gretchen entered the kitchen.

The old woman had heard Pulford's arrival, and had waited impatiently with her young mistress in the hope of a speedy summons to the kitchen. The idea of both the fugitives was that Crafton had

come in obedience to Gretchen's appeal. At last, unable to bear the suspense any longer, the old woman had come below upon a visit of investigation.

She halted upon the threshold, her heart beating wildly. The light in the kitchen blinded her after the darkness of the passage. She saw a group of persons, but could not make out one face or figure distinctly, owing to the blur that suddenly obscured her vision.

"It is nae longer possible to keep the matter till morning frae these puir women," said the younger Miss MacDougal. "Gretchen, come this way. Here is the frien' wha ye writ yere letter to. He is just coom."

Gretchen put her hand to her heart. Her rugged old face was transfigured with her great joy and relief.

"Mr. Crafton!" she gasped.

Pulford set his face in a stern and rigid expression. He arose and moved a step toward the old woman, and the light fell full upon his florid face and long sandy beard and full, heavy features. Gretchen turned pale. She had expected to behold the dark, thin visage of Crafton. She recognized Pulford at the first glance, and a thrill of terror, unaccountable to herself, since she did not suspect him of being the secret enemy of Miss Rosse, went through her at the recognition.

"Is this the companion of my poor niece?" asked Pulford, coolly.

"This is she!" replied MacDougal. "She ca's

hersel' the servant o' Miss Rosse. The twa seem to think the worl' o' each ither !"

"They did at the retreat," said Jarvis. "It was a singular attachment for two as never met till they met in my asylum, when Miss Rosse was brought there. The old woman had been there many years —a charity patient."

Gretchen looked from Jarvis to Mr. Pulford with a wild appeal.

Pulford's face was a study at that moment. He had schooled himself to the task he had in hand. The sternness and rigidity had deserted his features ; he looked compassionate, kindly, wondering. He regarded the poor old woman as if she had been an utter stranger to him, and shrank slightly from her as if he considered her a dangerous maniac.

Gretchen was bewildered by the mixed expression of Pulford's countenance, but, more than all, by his unlooked-for presence in that Highland farmhouse.

"Mr. Pulford !" she exclaimed. "It don't seem possible ! You here, sir ! Oh, sir, I don't know how it happens that you are here, unless you have discovered the treachery that was practised upon my young mistress ! I was sure that you and Lady Trevor would make inquiry after my poor Miss Cecil—"

"I don't understand you, my good woman," interrupted Pulford. "You have mistaken my name. I am Mr. Crafton !"

Gretchen staggered back a pace.

"Do you deny that you are the gentleman we saw at Lady Trevor's house ?" she exclaimed, sharply. "Do you deny that you are Mr. Pulford, and that

you met us at Gravesend and put us on board the yacht? Do you deny—"

Pulford put up his hand in a gesture that silenced her.

"My good woman," he said coolly, "I never saw you before in my life!"

Gretchen put one hand to her head, and stood amazed.

"Poor creature," said Pulford. "She's mad, doctor—mad as a March hare!"

Gretchen stood for one moment, wild and incredulous, her face white, her breath gasping. Pulford's denial of ever having seen her before overwhelmed her with amazement and consternation. She saw that the MacDougals began to regard her askance. She comprehended her own peril and that of her young mistress, now that Pulford had espoused the cause of Jarvis, but she gave no thought to it. A flood of suspicion poured suddenly in upon the old woman's soul. She drew up her heavy old figure; her withered face kindled; her gray old eyes flashed like drawn steel in the sunlight; a mighty indignation took possession of her.

"I see!" she cried, her voice ringing through the old kitchen, pointing her long and bony forefinger at Pulford with stern accusing. "You are in league with Jarvis. You are his employer! It is you, Mr. Pulford, who are the secret enemy of my young mistress. It is you who caused her to be taken to Black Rock—you who plotted to destroy her life—you who bribed this wretch to kill her! Coward! Murderer! Assassin! I have found you out at last!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. PETERS' VISIT.

Lady Trevor sat alone in her morning-room. It was the morning after her visit to the theatre. Mr. Pulford had already started for Scotland; and the widow was meditating darkly upon the probable success of his nefarious scheme, and the reward she meant to bestow upon him in lieu of her hand in marriage.

She was thus engaged, when a servant entered with the announcement that a poor woman named Peters wished to see her.

"I don't see beggars!" said Lady Trevor, haughtily. "You ought to know better than to bring such a message to me, Tompkins."

The servant retreated in confusion, but presently returned, deprecating and humble, but bearing a salver on which lay a soiled card.

"If you please, my lady," he said, "the woman says as her business is most important, and as you'd see her if you knew who she was. This is her card."

"Some servant I once employed, perhaps," said

Lady Trevor. "I can't see her, Tompkins. I won't be disturbed. Stay—let me see the card."

Her jeweled fingers daintily touched the scrap of pasteboard, and her ladyship put up her gold-mounted eye-glass to survey it. She read simply these words :

"Mrs Sarah Peters, of Baden-Baden, wishes to speak about 'Mrs. Nelson.'"

The card dropped to the floor. Lady Trevor's hand fell to her side. The servant did not see the frightened, startled, desperate look that leaped to her eyes. There was a brief silence. He retreated, trembling, toward the door, anticipating a storm of anger. But Lady Trevor said very quietly, and he did not notice that her voice was strangely hoarse :

"It is an old servant, as I surmised. Show her up, Tompkins. And see that I am not interrupted while she is here."

Tompkins withdrew and ushered in the visitor. Then he retreated, closing the door behind him.

Lady Trevor arose slowly, confronting Mrs. Peters. The visitor was shabbily dressed, as on the previous day. Her gait was shambling, but she advanced boldly, her sickly face flushed with a sort of exultation which her ladyship did not fail to mark.

"You wished to see me, Mrs.—ah—Mrs. Peters ?" said Lady Trevor, pushing the card into view with the toe of a rosetted slipper, and regarding it again with her eye-glass.

"I wished to see you, Mrs. Nelson, otherwise Lady Trevor," said Mrs. Peters.

Lady Trevor started.

"What do you mean by calling me Mrs. Nelson?" she demanded.

"That was the name I knew you by in Germany, fifteen years ago. You seem to have forgotten me, madam."

"You are laboring under some strange mistake. You have taken me for some one else, Mrs. Peters."

"No, I haven't, I could never forget them eyes. You look hardly a year older than you did then, Mrs. Nelson—"

"I am Lady Trevor—be good enough to remember that!" said her ladyship, imperiously.

"It's natural for me to call you by the name you told me was your'n," said Mrs. Peters, seating herself upon a low marquise chair, and stretching out her large ill-shod feet upon the polished silver fender, with the air of one very much at home. "I saw you in the park, yesterday, a-riding in your carriage, and dressed to kill, looking like a doll that's made to wear fine clothes and be carried about. And I sat there on a bench in these here clothes, a-looking on at the fine folks, jist as if I was made of some dreadful infer'or clay."

"You saw me?" said Lady Trevor, forcing herself to speak calmly. "And so you resolved to come and ask me for help? Is that what you want to say?"

"That is what I thought yesterday," replied Mrs. Peters, a little sullenly. "But since then I've got

more light. Do you suppose that because I'm poor I've got no natural feeling? I want to ask you about the child. Don't ask what child. If you try to play off ignorant, and that you are not the woman I knew at Baden-Baden as Mrs. Nelson, I will go to Lord St. Leonards, as is your grandfather, and ask him where the child is."

Lady Trevor sat down in her chair suddenly, as if deprived of strength. Her hard and desperate eyes were turned away from Mrs. Peters' inquisitive gaze, but the visitor saw that the lady's lips set themselves together in a fierce tense line, and that the lady's brows contracted in an ominous frown.

There was a long silence between the pair. Mrs. Peters toasted her feet on the fender and watched the steam arising from her wet shoes, and now and then fixed a curious glance upon Lady Trevor, who sat like a statue, with that fixed frown on her brows, and her set lips strangely silent and motionless.

In truth, she was struggling with emotions such as the visitor could never have understood. Her soul was the scene of conflicting passions, terror, anxiety, fear and despair. She was trying to consider how best to deal with this new trouble assailing her—how to rid herself of this woman, whose tongue must be silenced.

"I say," said Mrs. Peters at length, tiring of the stillness, "where is the child?"

"It's dead!" said her ladyship, huskily, not moving.

"Dead?" repeated Mrs. Peters.

"Did you think it promised a long life?" said

Lady Trevor, with a sneer. "Was it so healthy that you anticipated for it a good old age?"

"Why, no. The child was sickly from its birth. The doctor said it had marasmus. It sort o' pined and wasted away from the very beginning, but then you said that good living and good doctring might bring it out, after all."

"Well, they didn't."

"I've often wondered," said Mrs. Peters, "why a rich lady, newly married as you seemed to be, not much above twenty years old, should have wished to adopt a little sickly child like mine. To be sure the child was pretty, if I do say it, with her little fair face and brown curls and bright, soft eyes, so uncomplaining and gentle always, and at the time I believed you had took a fancy to her, you and Mr. Nelson, which was Sir Albert Trevor, I suppose. I thought that perhaps you could do more for her than I could, and perhaps some of the great doctors might cure her."

Lady Trevor moved uneasily, but did not answer.

"I should never have let her go if I hadn't been situated just as I was, and if I hadn't believed I was acting for the child's good," continued Mrs. Peters. "My husband was valet to an English gentleman as had took up his residence at Baden. My husband wrote to me to come to him, as the change of air might help the child, and as his mistress wanted a lady's maid, and he thought she might take me. But when I arrived, my husband said I must put the child out in some cheap farm-house, with one of them German women as can't

speak English. Of course I refused. Then we quarreled terrible. The child was in our way. What to do I didn't know. I was as near desperate in them days as ever I was in my life. I wanted the situation offered me, but I couldn't part with the child to her detriment. I used to wish that she and I could die together and slip out of all the trouble!" added Mrs. Peters, with a sigh. "And it was then that Providence, as I thought, came to my relief!"

Lady Trevor opened her lips to speak, but her voice did not issue from them.

"I was sitting on a bench in the avenue leading to the Conversation Haus, with the child in my arms, a-listening to the band one afternoon," continued Mrs. Peters, "in that despair as I wished I was dead, when an English gentleman stopped and spoke to me and asked about the child. I remember him perfectly. He had a squint-like in one eye, and a mole on one cheek, and was fair, and looked as if he were rich. He asked particular about the child's age, and had her stand up while he questioned me about her height and the color of her eyes and hair. Then the first I knew, I was telling him all my trouble, that my husband was angry because I wouldn't send little Fanny away to die among strangers, and that I had no money for doctors. The gentleman listened and asked me to bring the child to his lodgings that evening, and to ask for Mr. Nelson."

"I know—I know—"

"I went, not knowing but his lady might take me

for her servant and allow me to keep the child with me. I found the lodgings very quiet and respectable. You were there in the parlor, and the gentleman called you Mrs. Nelson. He offered to adopt the child as his own. You told me that she should have the best care and doctoring money could buy. It seemed to me as if the whole thing was providential. I never stopped to ask any questions, nor to consult my husband, but accepted all your statements as truth, and consented to give you my child. When I went away that night, I left little Fanny with you."

"It is not necessary to repeat all this.'"

"I went back to my lodgings that night, rejoicing over little Fanny's good fortune," said Mrs. Peters, unheeding the impatient interruption. "The next morning I went and told my husband, and applied for the place of lady's maid, as was still vacant. My husband questioned me, and finally went with me to the house where I had seen you. You were gone, and the child was gone too.

"The landlady said that Mr. Nelson had hired the rooms on the previous day, paying a week in advance, that neither he nor his lady had brought any luggage, and that they had gone out late in the evening, soon after I left them, and taken the child with them saying that they would set out for England that very night. Thomas, my husband, could find no trace of the Nelsons or the child. The thing grew to be a terrible mystery to us. I got my situation, we lived abroad for years, and then came back to England. Other children were born

to us, and last year my husband died, but in all these years I never forgot little Fanny, nor lost all hope of seeing you again. And now we have met at last."

"What can you have to say to me, now that we have met?" demanded Lady Trevor. "I neither deny nor acknowledge in so many words that I am the woman you knew as Mrs. Nelson. But if I am, you can have no claim upon me—the child being dead."

"Can I not have? When and where did she die?"

"On the Continent."

"Did she die in Paris?"

Lady Trevor did not answer.

"I have heard how you came into your great fortune through the death of your little step-sister, the Lady Alba Ravendale," said Mrs. Peters. "I can't prove nothing, but I suspect a most stupendous fraud—"

"Woman!"

"I suspect," said Mrs. Peters, calmly, "that you took my poor, little, sickly child and passed her off as the little Lady Alba. I suspect that the child who died in Paris, and was brought to England and buried in the vault of the Marquis of St. Leonards, was my own sickly little Fanny. Perhaps the real Lady Alba was poisoned beforehand. Perhaps the real Lady Alba is alive to-day—"

"Woman! how dare you speak such words to me?"

"I think all these things, but I can't prove 'em—"

"I should think you could not. If you dared

charge me with such a crime in the hearing of other people I'd have you sent to prison. Do you know what rank and wealth and influence can do? I can crush you as I would a worm!"

"Perhaps so," said the seamstress; "but if I could prove what I suspect, I'd defy you, and go to Lord St. Leonards this very morning with my story. I'm an honest woman, although I'm poor. I would be no party to a fraud, my Lady Trevor. But I cannot be certain. If Lord St. Leonards were to ask me for proofs, I could not give them. In telling him all I suspect, I should only be getting myself into trouble that I couldn't see my way out of. I've thought the matter over, lying awake all last night. I know very well that if I told a story against you that I couldn't prove, I should be put in prison for libel, because suspicions go for nothing with the law. And so, madam, against my will I am forced to be silent."

"You have wronged me by your vile suspicions, Mrs. Peters. My little step-sister, the Lady Alba Ravendale, died—"

"In Paris? At the same time with my Fanny? The Lady Alba was in your charge. Did you have the two children together?"

"Yes, they were together. Your little Fanny was procured as a playmate for the little Lady Alba—"

"Who died of marasmus, like my Fanny. Where is my child buried?"

"In Paris," said Lady Trevor, desperately. "At Montmartre."

"I shall visit her grave. You may think because

I gave her up so readily to strangers that I did not love the child. I did love her. The mystery of her fate has always weighed upon me. I have looked for you for years, Lady Trevor, knowing that, if I could get at the truth, I should have you in my power. I am not very sharp-witted ; I cannot see through this mystery yet. It may all be as you say—"

"You waste words. You came here for money. How much do you want to ensure your complete silence ?"

"I am a widow and poor, with three sons to support. I have done sewing for a living, but am not able to work longer. I want an annuity sufficient to keep me in comfort and to educate my boys."

"Say a hundred pounds a year ?"

The seamstress' eyes sparkled. The amount named appeared to her a fortune.

"Yes," she declared, "for that sum I will agree to keep silent."

"You must not come to this house again for a year," said Lady Trevor, drawing from her pocket her silver port-monnaie. "Stay. You have three boys. Why don't you emigrate to one of the colonies ?"

"I have wished to do so. I have a brother who is a farmer in Tasmania. With a hundred pounds a year, I could buy me a farm, and bring up my sons to work on it. But I should have to have my passage-money extra—"

"Come and see me one week from to-night, and I will place the tickets for a cabin passage to Tasmania

in your hands," said her ladyship. "Here is the hundred pounds for your first year. You can buy your outfit before you come to me again. When you arrive in Tasmania, I will arrange that you shall find there an extra sum of one hundred pounds, so that you can make a good payment on your farm."

She extracted several bank-notes from her purse, and placed them in Mrs. Peters' hand. The seamstress counted them, stuffed them in her bosom, and arose with a flush of exultation on her sickly face.

"I'll be here a week from to-night, madam," she declared, "and all ready for the voyage."

She retreated to the door, with a last glance of triumph at the baronet's widow, and then made her way into the hall.

As the house door closed behind her, Lady Trevor muttered :

"That difficulty, which threatened to destroy me, is met and conquered. Pulford shall get her tickets and see her off."

Mrs. Peters cautiously descended the slippery steps and paused a moment on the pavement, saying to herself :

"That money came easy. I might have got more. I'd like to emigrate well enough, but I'd like more money to go with. I'm not sure but the marquis would pay handsome for the information about Fanny, and not let me be prosecuted because I couldn't prove it. There's a risk, to be sure, in telling him. I must think the matter over. Anyhow, the first thing to do with this here money will be to get a decent outfit of clothes. And, the second

thing I'll do will be to go to Paris, and find out if two children died there at the same time, of the same disease, in the same family. And then I'll look for little Fanny's grave. I may be sharp enough, knowing what I know to start on, to clear up this mystery to my satisfaction and to prove my suspicions! And if I prove Lady Trevor guilty of the fraud and wickedness I suspect her of, the knowledge will make my fortune!"

CHAPTER XIX.

DEVASTATION.

Gretchen's fiery denunciation of Mr. Pulford fairly appalled the listeners. A silence followed, as profound as terrible. The MacDougals, quiet, stolid people, unused to such display of passion, stared at the old woman in alarm. Jarvis retreated a step before the flashing eyes and stern accusing finger. But Pulford stood his ground, apparently unmoved by her recognition of his villainly and his enmity to Cecil. Yet the flush that burned redly on his florid cheeks, the fierce light that leaped to his eyes, the quick compression of his lips, might have assured his companions, had they noted these indications, that his wrath, still though it was, burned at a white heat.

He held in his anger with stern and powerful control. He was so much master of himself that he even assumed a pitying expression, regarding Gretchen with apparent compassion.

"Poor creature!" he said calmly. "This is terrible, Doctor. What do you do for her when she is violent like this?"

His employer's coolness restored Jarvis' self-possession.

"We gen'ally lock her up in a padded room in these here moods!" he muttered. "She's uncommon dangerous!"

Pulford turned to his hostess.

"Mrs. MacDougal," he exclaimed, "I thought you deemed the woman sane?"

Mr. MacDougal regarded Gretchen doubtfully. Even Mrs. MacDougal drew away from the old woman who seemed so suddenly to have become an incarnate fury, and had not a word to say in her defence.

"My good woman," said Jarvis, in a soothing voice, addressing Gretchen, who still stood in warlike attitude, struggling with her emotions, "this violence frightens these here good people. Go up stairs—"

"And leave you and this enemy of poor Miss Cecil to plot against her?" exclaimed Gretchen. "Mr. MacDougal—madam—you will not give us up to these wretches?" she pleaded wildly. "I tell you they mean to kill Miss Cecil, my poor young mistress, who never harmed a worm. For God's sake, save her! Turn these men out of your house. In heaven's name—"

"Hoot! woman," interrupted MacDougal, sternly and rebukingly, with the air of one deeply scandalized. "It becomes not sic frail creatures as we to be sae familiar wi' the names o' holy things. It is blasphemy to speak sic wards as yours. Calm your

passions, woman, an' speak the wards o' truth and soberness, an' ye ken them."

Gretchen tried to calm herself, but her terrors held full possession of her, and would not be restrained.

"I do not care for myself," she cried, despairingly, "but for my young mistress. This man is her enemy. He sent us to Black Rock by an act of treachery, pretending that the yacht would take us to Yorkshire. He hired this man Jarvis to kill us. He is not Mr. Crafton—he is not the gentleman I wrote to—"

The farmer's patience gave way.

"Hoot! woman," he said again. "Do ye deny this mon to be your friend, when he cam' frae Lunnon at your bidding? There is nae post ony ance a week; the dochther couldna sent for him, as the post left before the dochther cam'. What brought him here but your summons? How cam' he to ken your presence here but for your letter? I begin to think mysel' your brain is crackit. Ye dinna speak the wards o' sense or wisdom."

Gretchen scanned the faces around her with a last vain appeal. They all looked coldly upon her, even Mrs. MacDougal. These Highland people lived such quiet lives, free from warring passions, remote from knowledge of darker crimes, that Gretchen's wild words seemed to them the ravings of lunacy.

"She seemed quiet enoo' till the night," muttered Mrs. MacDougal. "I wadna hae believit she could

hae gang on like this to a pleasant spoken gentleman, that cam' fra Lunnon at her ain bidding."

Gretchen drew a long, hard breath.

"There is no use in my saying more," she said hopelessly. "You will not believe me, any of you. But I warn you that Miss Cecil and I will not go with these men. Mr. Pulford, I will rouse the hamlet. I will scream for help. I will command you to prove the charge of lunacy against us. We will sell our lives dearly. You—"

"I do not think my niece is safe in the same room with this person," said Pulford, smoothly. "She ought to be locked up in a room by herself."

Gretchen beat a precipitate retreat to the door.

"You shall not separate me from my young mistress!" she flashed. "You shall never take us from this house alive, Mr. Pulford—never! Miss Cecil and I will die together, if need be, but not by your hand, you cowardly assassin!"

Not trusting herself to speak another word, fearing lest her enemies should seize upon her and prevent her return to her mistress, old Gretchen fled up the stair to Cecil's chamber, and the listeners heard her barricade the door.

"I think no harm will come to Miss Rosse through the old woman's being with her," said Jarvis. "Miss Rosse always soothes and quiets the old creetur', when these here streaks come on."

"You have seen the condition of this poor demented person for yourself, Mr. MacDougal," said Pulford, quietly turning to his host. "I do not know what effect her denunciations of me may have upon

your mind, but I trust myself without misgivings to your calm and unbiased judgment. As the post leaves here but once a week, and as it left bearing this old woman's letter, before the doctor's arrival, I think it is clearly proven, as you say, that I came in response to that letter. How else, as you also say, could I have known that my niece is here? Still, although it is clearly proven that I am Mr. Crafton, and the uncle of Miss Rosse, I desire to establish myself thoroughly in your confidence, and to refute the charges of this crazy old woman. Is there a physician near here?"

"Nane nearer than thirty miles."

"We will send for a physician to-morrow, nevertheless," said Pulford, calmly. "I will prove to you by a medical man that my poor niece is unmistakably insane. It is a wonder that she has not betrayed her mental condition by some act of violence as that poor old woman has done."

"Wad ye wish to see the young lady to-night?" asked Mrs. MacDougal.

"No, madam, I prefer to wait until morning. I am tired after my journey, and feel scarcely able to encounter another scene of violence," said Pulford. "But, in the morning, I will visit the dear child. You will see then that she will recognize me gladly. Poor girl! she used to be very fond of her uncle in the old days."

He drew a long sigh and resumed his seat by the fire. The family were seated also, but their tasks were not again taken up. They were all anxious

and excited, all seriously troubled and oppressed with vague forebodings.

Pulford exerted himself to make an agreeable impression upon them, and in this he succeeded. He told a very pathetic story of his "niece's" disappointment in love and consequent insanity, drawing largely upon an imagination which was unusually prolific and vivid upon this occasion.

Mrs. MacDougal wiped her eyes frequently, and Elspeth more than once sobbed aloud. The pretty and sorrowful romance which Pulford wove about their young guest filled them with tender pity for her and sympathy for him. Before he had talked an hour, he had completely won their confidence.

"I should like to retire early," he said, at last, desiring to leave them while their good impression was at its height, "since you are so good as to keep me to-night."

Elspeth and the maid had slipped out and prepared the joint room of the former and her sister for Pulford's occupancy. The chamber was now ready. Mrs. MacDougal lighted another tallow candle, and bade the new guest follow her. Pulford made his adieux for the night with pleasant grace, and followed his hostess' guidance.

He was shown to a room upstairs which was separated only from that occupied by Cecil and her maid by a thin partition. It was a low, spacious apartment, with sloping roof, and dormer windows, with a bare floor spotlessly clean and dotted with sheepskin rugs, and with furniture of the simplest and cheapest description. Yet two gaudy-colored

prints on the wall, curtains of white netted yarn at the windows, a netted coverlet on the high bed, and a crystalized bouquet on a wooden shelf, showed the same desire for beauty and ornament in that lonely Highland farmhouse, as is expressed in the more luxurious adornments of homes in the very centres of civilization.

"Your niece has the room next ye, sir, on this side," said Mrs. MacDougal, setting down her light. "There's nae dure between, ye see. An' on the ither side is the dochther's room. Mak' yersel comfortable, sir. Is there onything more ye wad hae?"

"Nothing, thank you," replied Mr. Pulford. "You are very kind, madam. I can never sufficiently express my gratitude to you for your great kindness and hospitality, not only to me, but to my poor, afflicted niece. Good-night, madam!"

He escorted her to the door politely, closing it gently after her.

Then he sat down on a high-backed, rush-bottomed chair and took a leisurely survey of the room. He heard Jarvis ascend the stairs to his own chamber, and, a minute later, fling his boots noisily on the floor. He heard the sound of moving furniture below, but presently a silence succeeded. He removed his own boots, and crept across the floor, and placed his ear to the wall of Cecil's room. A murmur of voices reached his ears, but he could not distinguish words.

He listened thus a long time, but failing to make

out anything of the conversation going on so near him, he returned to his seat.

The silence deepened throughout the house. The hour grew late. Pulford consulted his watch several times. The hands pointed to midnight when his door cautiously opened, and Jarvis crept noiselessly in.

He put up his hand warningly, enjoining the utmost guardedness.

Jarvis did not speak until he had reached the side of his employer.

"Every one in the house is asleep except ourselves," he then said, in a whisper. "At any rate, the family is snorin' below beautiful. They are all packed away in the lower rooms like herrin's in a box. We've got the whole upper floor to ourselves."

Pulford pointed over his shoulder significantly in the direction of the room occupied by Miss Rosse and her servant.

"I remember," said Jarvis, nodding. "They may be awake, very likely, but I will be careful not to arouse 'em. You played it splendid tonight, Guv'nor, like a born actor. The way you told 'em that 'ere story about the gal being disap'inted would a drawed tears from a stun. I could hear old MacDougal himself a-snuffling. They think you the most tender-hearted man alive."

"But for all that," whispered Pulford, "notwithstanding their faith in me, I should find it difficult to get away with the girl in the morning. In the

first place, she is not insane; and, if they are not fools, that fact must dawn upon the understanding of some member of the family. She will be too keen to go into a rage like Gretchen. She will demand an investigation, and their infernal Scotch caution will make them yield to her demand."

"You read 'em like a book, sir."

"We have no time to wait, even if we dared risk the investigation. Crafton is likely to arrive in the morning. It's a wonder to me that he didn't arrive to-night. We must be out of the way before he comes. In short, Jarvis, to avoid all risks, the girl and her servant must be disposed of to-night."

"According to the plan already made and devised, I suppose?"

"Exactly. I can think of nothing better. Are you sure that these Scots are such sound sleepers that our proceedings will not be overheard or suspected?"

"I am positive certain. They sleep like logs. They rise at daybreak and work hard all day, and at night they couldn't be wakened short of a thunderclap, and p'raps not by that. I went down last night to the kitchen, about this time, for an extra pull at his jug of whiskey, and though I stumbled over a chair, no one heard me."

"Good. They must be in the midst of their first and soundest sleep now. This, then, is our time for work. You know where they are—go down for the combustibles."

Jarvis assented, and noiselessly withdrew from the room.

Pulford listened while he descended the stair, but no sound betrayed Jarvis' movements. Pulford then listened anew at the partition dividing his own from Cecil's room. No sound came from the girl's apartment.

"They must be asleep," he muttered.

He resumed his seat. The minutes became half-an-hour. He was growing anxious, when his door again opened and his ally re-entered, bearing two immense baskets, well laden.

"It's all right, Guv'nor," said Jarvis, in a whisper. "I've had splendid luck. See what I've got."

He displayed the contents of the baskets. In one were shavings, pine cones, and bits of dry wood. In the other were a box of home-made tallow candles, a jar of "drippings"—or kitchen fat—a bottle of spirits of camphor, a pan of lard, and a quantity of butter.

Pulford examined these effects and expressed his satisfaction.

"I rummaged their larder," said Jarvis, "and took everything that seemed likely to serve our purpose. And not a soul of the family stirred. They'll be lucky if they awake in time to save their lives."

"There is a bed of loose straw under my feather bed," said Pulford. "I discovered it while you were gone. Get that out."

Jarvis obeyed.

"There's a straw bed in my room," he whispered, when he had deposited the huge sack of straw on the floor. "I'll get that too."

He went to his own room and procured the straw

bed and laid it down in the hall before the door of the room occupied by Miss Rosse and Gretchen. Pulford brought his own bed, heaping it upon the other. Then the two, working swiftly and silently, pausing frequently to listen, piled upon and interspersed between the sacks of straw the contents of the two huge baskets The lard and the butter were strewn about the mass, the spirits of camphor was poured upon it, and, finally, Jarvis brought chairs from his own and his master's room and added them to the pile.

The door was nearly hidden by the outer barricade they had thus raised. Jarvis brought a small table and some other articles, while Pulford listened with a wildly-beating heart.

"All is safe!' he whispered at last. "The girl is doomed. She has barricaded her door on the inside with light deal furniture, which will catch from the blaze of this mass. Nothing can save her—"

"She may escape from her windows!"

"I think she'll suffocate. The house is dry as tinder. The thatch will catch and burn like tow. They don't stand much chance of escape by the windows; but, to make all sure, do you go below and lie in wait for them under their windows. I stay here until the latest minute possible."

Jarvis assented. Pulford drew out his matchcase and deliberately lighted a match and dropped it into the lower strata of the inflammable pile.

The drop of fire grew larger and brighter, seized upon the straw and grease and spirits, and leaped up upon the instant into a giant red blaze.

Jarvis beat a swift and silent retreat down the stair and out of doors, stationing himself under Cecil's windows.

Pulford returned to his own room and put on his shoes.

With his door slightly ajar, he watched the progress of the fire he had created.

The greedy flames licked up the grease and straw, seized upon the chairs and tables, caught at the framework of the door beside it, and sent long, red, exploring fingers through the crevices, catching at the woodwork on the other side, and mounted to the unplastered flooring above.

Within five minutes the thatched roof was ablaze. Still, no sound came from Cecil's room.

"She'll surely be suffocated!" thought Pulford, exultantly. "She'll awaken from her sleep in another world than this!"

The flames came creeping towards his own room and the staircase. Cecil's room was all on fire. The smoke and heat were terrible. Still, Pulford waited.

It was not until the entire roof was a mass of flames, and the upper floor was in the grasp of the fiery monster, and a faint, far-off cry of 'fire!' came to his ears from the hamlet beyond, that he turned his thoughts from the destruction of Cecil and Gretchen to securing his own safety.

He flung open the door and made a dash for the staircase. The fire had taken possession already of the deal wood-work and steps. Gathering a blanket over his head he rushed down the stair through

smoke and flame and burst into the kitchen, the flames following him like ravening wolves through the open door.

"Fire! Fire!" he yelled. "Wake up! You'll be burned alive! Fire!"

He bounded to the outer door, undid the latch, and staggered into the yard repeating his cries.

The family, aroused, sprang from their beds, and, grasping the nearest garments in their hands, fled out of the doors in the wildest terror and confusion, adding their shouts to his.

Pulford hastened to his ally.

The windows of Cecil's room were closed. Jarvis declared that no one had opened them, or escaped by them.

"It's too late for escape now," said Pulford, grimly. "They'll never make us any more trouble."

The farmer, nearly beside himself, drew on his garments, and directed his sons and daughters to try to save their household effects. He made a movement to follow them into the house, bethought himself of his guests, and came running toward the plotters.

They pretended to be hastily completing their toilets.

"Your niece, sir!" gasped MacDougal. "She and the old woman will be burned to death."

"Is there no ladder near?" cried Pulford, distractedly. "My poor girl! It's all the work of that old woman. Doctor, can't you scale the house-wall?

To see her perish thus before my eyes! Oh merciful heaven!"

He made a gesture as if to throw himself into the flames. Jarvis seized him and held him back. The people of the hamlet came flocking up, articles of clothing and furniture were dragged from the kitchen at the peril of life, while several men brought a ladder with which they resolved to attempt the rescue of Miss Rosse and Gretchen.

This ladder, too short for the purpose required, had been scarcely placed against the house-wall when the roof fell in.

A cry of dismay went up from the little crowd.

"Too late!" shouted a burly shepherd, who had been first to procure the ladder. "The wall rocks! There she goes!"

The wall tottered and fell. The crowd retreated to a safe distance, breathless and terror-stricken. The flames seized upon the entire house, and wrapped it in one wild and lurid blaze.

Mrs. MacDougal gave way to her grief in tears and lamentations, in which her daughters joined. The father and sons saw their home swept away before their eyes with no less grief, but with stern and tearless eyes. The neighbors were loud in their consoling, and in their proffers of shelter. Pulford looked upon the scene of devastation with gleaming eyes and soul filled with wicked exultation.

"The girl is dead!" he said to himself. "The thing has been well done. Lady Trevor's secret is now buried beyond all power or possibility of resurrection!"

CHAPTER XX.

PULFORD'S TRIUMPH.

The morning dawned upon a scene of desolation. Where the picturesque farmhouse of the MacDougals had stood, was now spread a gray level of dead ashes. One solitary chimney, massive and blackened, was still standing, like a funeral monument, making the desolation appear yet more desolate.

The MacDougal women had been taken to the house of a neighbor after the fire had burned itself out. The MacDougal men had lingered late about the scene and had then retreated to their great barn, which had fortunately escaped the devastating element. Pulford and Jarvis had also taken to this retreat and had thrown themselves upon the fragrant hay, but not to sleep. Not one of the men in the barn slept again that night. The MacDougals discussed their loss, and the possible origin of the fire, and the fate of Miss Rosse and her servant, in low, hushed tones, but Pulford and his ally listened and were silent.

With the first faint gleam of dawn, Pulford crept noiselessly out into the fresh air. Jarvis followed him.

"Shall we settle now, Guv'nor?" said the ruffian as they moved slowly across the yard.

"I want to rake over those ashes first," said Pulford. "You may help me."

The light was increasing with every moment. The great hills that enclosed this remote valley were becoming outlined against the brightening horizon. The household goods scattered about the garden were distinctly visible. Pulford took up a kitchen poker that lay upon the best mirror the farmhouse had contained, and groped among the ashes.

"Her room was above this spot," he said. "We must surely find some fragment of bone to show her fate."

"The fire was frightful hot!" muttered Jarvis. "It may have burned up bones and all. But we can make a thorough search."

They did so, and discovered one or two fragments which they believed to be bone.

"We did not need these to prove that they were dead," said Jarvis. "Their windows were closed, showing that they could not have got out that way, even if I hadn't known it by watching. And we know that they could not have escaped by the door."

"And besides," said Pulford, "I never heard a sound in their rooms after the fire began. They talked in the earlier part of the evening, but dropped asleep at last, and I never heard so much as a murmur afterwards. They were suffocated in their sleep.

"An easy ending," observed Jarvis, coolly. "Well,

Guv'nor, I'm glad the thing is finished up so easy at the last. I've had no end of trouble. I've rode hard and fast, by night and by day, and deserve even a larger reward than you promised me. I suppose my wife and Mariar, who haven't seen me in nigh two weeks, are about frightened to death about me. They may think as the gal and Gretchen got clear away, and as I'm took by the cops. I shall start for Black Rock at once!"

"And I shall start for London. Come this way, Jarvis. I'll pay you the sum I promised, and give you the money for Maria, which I agreed to pay her. I came provided with money to settle these debts."

They walked aside to a little distance, and halted under a pine tree. Pulford drew out his pocket-book and paid the sums agreed upon, and, in his good nature and delight, added an extra sum.

"See that Maria does not trouble me by a visit," enjoined Pulford. "And, as for you, Jarvis, keep you distance. If I want your services again, I'll come to you. But you must never come near me, remember!"

Jarvis promised compliance, counted his money and put it in his pocket.

"So ends this adventure!" said Pulford. "The job is done—you are paid—the girl is dead, leaving no trace of her late existence. Let what will happen now. I am content."

They slowly retraced their steps, as Mr. MacDougal, haggard and anxious, came out of the barn and approached them.

"A sorra sight for a puir man, Mr. Crafton," said

the farmer, bitterly, pointing to the ashes. "Last night, when I lay doon to sleep, I had a tidy roof aboove me and a warm fireside. This was the hoose where I was born, the hoose where a' my children were born, the hoose in which I hoped to die. An' now it's gane. I'm that puir, sir, that I canna offer ye' a breakfas', not even a sup o' parritch."

"I sympathize with you, Mr. MacDougal," said Pulford, "with all my heart. Yours is a terrible loss."

"But naething like yours, sir," said MacDougal, bravely. "The wurrest of a' was that the bonnie lassie an' the auld woman were burnt to death. Puir creeturs! I canna speak my sorrow for your loss, sir."

"My poor niece!" sighed Pulford. "Her weary wandering brain has found rest at last! I fear, Mr. MacDougal, that your kindness to those poor women has brought this catastrophe upon you. The fire originated in their room. I am persuaded that the old woman, in a frenzy of lunacy, set fire to the house and perished with her friend and companion, my niece, in the flames."

"I hae nae doot that ye are right, sir," groaned MacDougal.

"I have searched the ashes for some vestige of the poor creatures, and have found remnants of bone, I think," continued Pulford, affecting a deep grief. "I cannot speak further on this subject. It harrows up my soul nearly to madness. Let us speak of yourself. Was your house insured?"

"Insured?" repeated the farmer blankly. "I

dinna understan'! It is a dead loss, sir. There'll be nae a penny cooming back to me frae the ashes!"

"I am sorry to hear it. But I cannot permit you to lose so heavily by an act of kindness, sir. Although I knew nothing of the old woman, and of course have no responsibility in regard to her, yet I desire to lighten your sense of loss as much as I can. Here is a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. Accept this from me, Mr. MacDougal, in the name of my dead niece."

The farmer protested, but Pulford urged the sum upon him. He ended by accepting it with a burst of thanks and with joyful tears, which he turned aside to hide.

"May God bless ye accordin' to your deserts, sir," he exclaimed.

Pulford winced.

"I think," said the villain, "that my friend, the doctor, will have to hasten his return to Incledon. His patients will miss him sadly. And as for me, I must hurry back to town with the tidings of my poor niece's fate. We will not intrude upon you longer in your hour of darkness and grief. If one of your neighbors will give us a breakfast we will set out upon our respective journeys."

"They are up over at McKay's," said the farmer, looking toward the nearest farmhouse. "I'll tak' ye there. He'll gie ye a good breakfast an' a thoosan' welcomes."

MacDougal guided his guests to the farmhouse in question. The family was up and dressed; a smok-

ing breakfast was being put upon the table at the moment of the visitors' entrance. The new comers were made welcome. When MacDougal had told of Pulford's gift, the latter found himself regarded as a princely benefactor. Mrs. MacDougal and her daughters overwhelmed him with tears and blessings. A breakfast of bacon and eggs, broiled birds and bannocks, porridge and cakes, was placed before the guests. When they had finished their repast, and had risen from the table, the housewife packed a hamper for the "doctor" to carry before him on his horse—Pulford buying a stout animal of MacDougal and presenting it to Jarvis, the ponies being quite useless.

Pulford and Jarvis then made their adieux, mounted, and rode out of the farmyard together.

They paused in the highway for a few last words, and then separated, proceeding in different directions. Jarvis headed for Black Rock in excellent spirits, and Pulford proceeded in the opposite direction, hoping to reach Inverness that night.

He had proceeded but a few miles along the pleasant country road which ran through a wild and picturesque region, when he beheld approaching him, at a brisk pace, a carriage drawn by two stout horses.

"I believe it's Crafton," he muttered. "I've got away from the MacDougals just in time."

He hastily dismounted and led his horse aside into the shelter of the wayside bushes. Then he crouched low in the shadow, watching and waiting.

The carriage advanced and was soon abreast of

him. It was a stout vehicle, evidently belonging to Inverness. The driver on the box was a Scot. Pulford saw the occupant of the carriage, who was leaning forward and looking out of the window with an impatient expression on his countenance, and recognized him at the first glance.

He was Maldred Crafton.

Pulford waited until the carriage had gone by, rejoicing in having escaped Crafton's observation, and then emerged from his concealment, remounted, and resumed his journey, exclaiming gleefully:

"Too late! You can go on to MacDougal's farmhouse, Maldred Crafton, and welcome! The jewel you are seeking is no longer there. Cecil Rosse is dead!"

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE TRACK.

The hour was late in the afternoon. Crafton was alone in his chambers, indulging in a gloomy reverie. He was thinking of Cecil Rosse. He loved her with all his soul, with all the fervor of his hard and powerful nature. His faith in the ultimate success of his search for her had never wavered until now, but he was in a depressed and dejected mood, and was considering at last seriously the possibility that she and her old servant might be dead. He pictured her in her bright young beauty, with her dark brown eyes, with the golden glint in them, illuminating her lovely face; and with her red-brown hair, with its golden shimmer rippling away from her pure, pale brow, as radiant and glorious as she had been in her home in the Black Forest. Could that radiance and beauty have died out upon this earth forever? Had the young life, with its spirit and intelligence, its grand possibilities, faded away like a dream? And if she were dead, how had she died? And where had she been buried?

"There's been foul play somewhere," he said to himself, savagely. "She has some enemy, else she and Gretchen would never have disappeared so utterly, leaving no trace behind them. But who is that enemy? By heaven! I'd give ten years of my life to know!"

He was thinking thus when a knock sounded on his door, and Lord Glenham entered.

The blonde earl looked worn and haggard. The bitter experiences of the past few months had left their traces on every feature of that noble face. The proud, firm mouth was set in a strangely stern expression; the broad forehead wore a troubled look; the gray eyes were graver than of yore, and full of intense and passionate gloom. His movements showed weariness. The entire purpose of his life had been changed; his dearest hopes thwarted; but his brave and resolute expression showed that, in spite of long defeat, he had by no means given up all expectation of finding the missing girl he loved.

"Come in, old fellow," said Crafton, rising, his dark face brightening. "Glad to see you. Any news?"

"None whatever," replied the young earl, accepting the proffered chair. "I knew that you had been following up some new clew, and I dropped in to inquire into your success."

"I have had no success," responded Crafton, gloomily. "There is nothing more to be done, Glenham. I have searched the hospitals even, but I have found no trace of the lost ones. I give over the search. Miss Rosse and her servant were the

victims of some terrible fatality, or of some secret enemy of the young lady. I was thinking, when you came in, that she must have had some enemy who may have murdered her !"

The earl started.

"What enemy could she have ?" he questioned. "She—so innocent, so young, so good !—It is impossible !"

"Not so. A jealous woman like Lady Trevor might have caused her to be smuggled out of the country, or might even have destroyed her. I fancied that the handsome widow loved you, Glenham, until these reports of her engagement to that Pulford came out. No one could compel her to marry him, so she must marry him from inclination. And if that is true, she couldn't have loved you, you know."

The earl's face flushed hotly.

"We will not speak of Lady Trevor, Crafton," he said, gravely. "I believe her to be incapable of crime ; and, if it were true that she had sent Miss Rosse to the Antipodes against her will, she would have been guilty of a very serious crime."

"As you say, we will not speak of Lady Trevor. I do not share your high opinion of her, Glenham ; but, since she is engaged to marry Pulford, I cannot see that she would have had sufficient motive to rid herself of Miss Rosse. But I am none the less sure that Miss Rosse had a terrible and deadly enemy."

"Who could that enemy have been ? Who can it be ?"

"Therein, possibly, lies the clew to the entire

mystery. I know the history of Miss Rosse. What was her origin? Who was the man who brought her to the pastor's house in the depths of the Black Forest? The pastor received a letter from that unknown just before his death, which betrayed a positive enmity for Miss Rosse. That unknown expressed his desire that the young lady should marry a German peasant, and alluded to his stipulation that she was to have been brought up as a servant. Certainly that man, who never betrayed the nature of his relationship to Miss Rosse, and who certainly hated her, and who desired her to be brought up in ignorance and as a peasant, is likely to have discovered her departure from Zorlitz, her presence in London, and to have formed some design against her liberty and life. I think, Glenham, that the man who took her to Zorlitz, who knows the real story of her birth and parentage, is the author of her mysterious disappearance."

"And I believe it too," cried the earl, convinced as much by Crafton's earnestness and positive assurance as by his own reason. "We have stumbled upon a theory which must be worked up. We will consult detectives anew—"

"And fail as before. The man who hated or feared Miss Rosse has done his work well. She has been eight months missing. We have searched Great Britain and the continent of Europe. We have found no clue to her. She is dead—they must both be dead."

"I will not believe it!" cried the earl, with passionate emphasis. "Miss Rosse is not dead. I feel

that she is living. I know that, were she dead, some instinct would tell me the awful truth. I believe that she is in trouble, in sore and terrible distress, that she may be a prisoner somewhere—but I cannot, will not, believe that she is dead!"

"How or where she died, or who buried her," said Crafton, dejectedly, "we shall never know, but one thing is sure—if she were living we should have found her."

"I shall not cease to hope," declared the earl, resolutely, although his face was pale and deeply anxious. "As I shall not cease to search for her, I know that I shall find her some day, Crafton, sooner or later. I shall devote my life to the task of finding her."

"Then you will waste a life that might have been blessed to yourself and others, and will make your mother miserable," said Crafton, sighing. "Poor Lady Glenham! She idolizes you, my friend. I am sorry for her. I have a trick of bearing every one else's burdens," he added. "I feel Miss Rosse's loss as deeply as you do yourself, I think."

"I have proved your friendship in my great trouble, Crafton," declared the earl, warmly, stretching out his hand to grasp that of the traitor. "You have given all your time and strength to this seemingly hopeless search. I will never forget your goodness."

The loud rat-tat of the London postman upon the door below rang through the building and interrupted Crafton's reply. A minute later, the janitor of the house appeared, bringing a letter to Crafton.

The latter took it carelessly and laid it upon the table :

"As I was about to say," he remarked, "I have been a true friend to you, Glenham. If I could find Miss Rosse and restore her to you, I would give half the remaining years of my life—"

He turned the letter up, so that his gaze rested upon the address. The quaint German-looking characters arrested his attention. He stared at the post-mark.

"A begging letter, I suppose," he said, interrupting himself. "From Scotland, too ! I can't quite make out the exact address. I have no correspondents there—it must be a begging letter. Perhaps it contains a reminder from our deer-stalker, that I left in such haste as to forget his *douceur*. If you'll excuse me I'll just glance at it."

He tore open the envelope. A long sheet of coarse blue paper fell into his hands. He opened it, and the incoherent letter of poor old Gretchen was spread before his eyes.

As he saw the signature, at which he glanced first of all instinctively, he started, his face growing pale as death. His eyes lighted up with a burning glow, and a mighty agitation seized upon him. The letters danced before him on the page, fading or melting into a great blur, and the paper rattled in his shaking hands.

The earl regarded him in wondering surprise.

"Are you ill, Crafton ?" he asked, anxiously.

Crafton muttered an unintelligible response, shaking his head. He felt the necessity of hiding

his wild and sinister joy, and summoned to his aid all his powers of self-control. As a miser hides his treasure, so would he have hidden his letter at that moment but for fear of exciting the suspicion of the earl. He could not lay the letter aside unread, and, as soon as his vision cleared sufficiently, he glanced it over with devouring eyes.

As he took in all its meaning, as he comprehended that the letter was from Gretchen, that Cecil Rosse was alive, and that he of all men, he and not the earl, had been summoned to rescue her from a deadly peril, his heart swelled with a jubilance he could not conceal. He turned his face from the view of his companion, his eyes gleaming, his lips parted wolfishly above his white teeth, his breath coming hard. He crushed the letter in his hands and thrust it into his pockets.

A decanter stood on the table near. He poured a half-glass of brandy and drank it at a draught.

"It's bad news!" he said, his voice tremulous and husky. "A friend is in great trouble, and begs me to come to him by the first train. He meditates suicide. I must go to-night. Where is my latest Bradshaw? I bought one last week."

He made a search for it and found it.

"I've an hour in which to catch the train," he presently announced, his voice still quivering with his suppressed excitement. "I shall have to be expeditious. I am sorry to cut your visit short, old fellow, but I'll see you again upon my return to town, in two or three days."

He hastened to pack his portmanteau with changes

of linen, and to get out his heavy overcoat for night travel.

No suspicion entered the mind of the young earl that the friend he trusted was playing him false. He did not dream that the letter which had caused Crafton so much agitation was from Cecil's servant, and that it contained the address of the missing girl. Too noble to suspect treachery in his kinsman, he accepted Crafton's confused explanation as truth, and forebore to question him upon what he deemed the private affairs of one of the traitor's friends. He regarded Crafton in a leisurely manner while the latter hastened his preparations for departure.

"I think I'll go to the station with you," he remarked, consulting his watch. "You've no time to lose, if you expect to catch the nightmail."

Crafton rang and ordered a servant to "fetch a cab directly."

Then he hurriedly threw off his morning-coat, tossed it upon a chair, and sought in his wardrobe a garment more suited to the journey he contemplated.

As the discarded coat fell upon the chair the crumpled letter and envelope dropped out upon the floor.

Crafton put on a fresh garment, his pulses throbbing fiercely, his soul in a tumult. He repeated in his own mind over and over again like the refrain of a song: "Cecil is alive! Cecil's alive!" And once or twice he started, fancying that he had

spoken the words aloud, and that Glenham had heard him.

The search of months had drawn at last to an end. The girl was alive; he knew her address; he was going to her! No thought of imparting the glad news to the earl entered his mind. He meant to find Cecil, to rescue her, to make her his wife, leaving Lord Glenham still in despairing ignorance of her fate. He was tempted to make an effort to uproot that hope which Lord Glenhem still cherished in spite of long defeat.

"Take the advice of a friend, Glenham," he said, as he continued his preparations, "and give over searching for Miss Rosse. Reconcile yourself to the inevitable. Do not mourn longer for a girl who is certainly dead, when you can marry a beauty and heiress any day, worthy to share your name and rank. Think of your mother, my boy. Forgive me if my words seem harsh and unsympathetic, but I cannot bear to see you wasting your life, and killing your poor mother, who idolizes you, for the sake of a vain dream."

He caught up his discarded coat and began to rifle the pockets.

"Where the deuce is that letter?" he demanded in alarm.

The earl's quick glance discovered it. He bent forward and picked it up, restoring it to Crafton, and as he did so he noticed the quaint, German-looking illiterate style of hand-writing. His gaze rested directly upon the latter portion of the signa-

ture, and he made out distinctly the name, Heinrich.

Crafton seized upon the letter with a pouncing movement, and with a flushed face, and eyes gleaming with suspicion, put it securely in his bosom.

At the same moment the servant appeared and announced that the cab waited.

"Take down my portmanteau and top-coat, Simpkins," commanded Crafton.

The servant obeyed, disappearing down the stair. Lord Glenham passed out into the hall, and Crafton locked the door of the apartment, putting the key in his pocket.

They descended to the cab and were transported to the railway-station. The earl was very quiet and thoughtful throughout the drive. That name, Heinrich, haunted him. Crafton bestowed an anxious and inquiring glance upon him now and then, as if seeking to probe his thoughts. He wondered within himself if the earl had seen Gretchen's name, but became confident that he had not, because of his silence. There was no time for conversation after their arrival at the station, Crafton hastening to procure a first-class ticket to Edinburg, and to secure a compartment in a coach to himself, that he might sleep during the night undisturbed.

The earl witnessed his departure, and when the train had steamed out of the station, he set out upon his return home. He was very grave and thoughtful throughout the drive, with a heavy and deepening shade of anxiety on his brow.

In spite of his efforts to turn them into a different channel, his thoughts dwelt persistently upon the letter Crafton had received, upon Crafton's singular exultation and his inconsistent explanation, and most of all upon the partial signature he had observed.

"It was a woman's handwriting," he said to himself. "The writer is German, as indicated by penmanship and signature. It is equally clear that she is ill-educated."

He looked with troubled gaze from the cab windows into the dusky streets, with their gleaming gas-lights, shining shop-windows, hurrying tide of pedestrians and moving vehicles, but saw neither lights nor people. His whole soul was absorbed in this strange, new problem.

"Heinrich!" he muttered. "Where have I heard that name before? Heinrich! Is not that old Gretchen's name? I have a letter from the new pastor of Zorlitz in which old Gretchen's name is mentioned, and I almost fancy her name is Heinrich. Could Gretchen have written that letter? Impossible! To believe that would be to doubt my friend! If the letter had been from her, he would have told me at once. It is impossible!"

He set his lips together firmly, and, tortured by doubts, he waited in an agony of impatience until his drive was ended and the cab drew up before his stately, brilliantly-lighted mansion in Park Lane. He alighted hastily, flinging a half-sovereign to the cabman, sprang up the steps, and admitted himself into the house with his private latch-key. Then he

passed swiftly up the broad stairs to his own apartments.

It was near the dinner hour. His dressing-room was lighted; his dinner dress was laid out ready for use, but his valet was temporarily absent. The earl locked his door, and opened his private desk, emptying out its contents. Looking over his papers, he selected three letters which he had received, in answer to his own inquiries, from the new pastor of Zorlitz.

He unfolded and perused these missives. In one of these occurred this paragraph:

"The good people of Zorlitz mourn deeply over the mysterious fate of the poor young fraulein, the niece of the late Herr pastor, whose place I so unworthily occupy. Prayers go up for her morning and evening from the home-altars of Zorlitz, and neither is the most worthy and excellent Gretchen Heinrich, the fraulein's servant, forgotten, for she, too, has many friends here. God grant that this most terrible mystery may soon be cleared away, and these two highly-esteemed ones restored to those who love them!"

The earl repeated Gretchen's name to himself.

"Her name is Gretchen Heinrich, as I thought," he said, aloud. "That letter—could it have been from her?"

He arose and paced his floor with an impetuous tread. He reviewed, in his own mind, the words and manner of Crafton, and little by little

dawned upon him the perfect conviction that Gretchen had been the author of that mysterious letter from Scotland, and that Crafton was now speeding his way to her and to Miss Rosse !

The conviction brought with it an infinite joy, an ineffable gladness !

Cecil was alive ! For some moments he had no thought but for this supreme idea—she was alive !

He sat down again, trembling, and pale with the pallor of the dead ; but his glad eyes, and quivering mouth, and working features told that his nature was moved to its deepest depths, and that his joy was overmastering in its intensity.

As he grew calmer, his conviction, singularly enough, brought with it no suspicion of Crafton's treachery to himself.

"The letter was from Gretchen !" he assured himself. "Crafton would not tell me until Cecil's safety should be assured beyond a doubt—until he could bring her to London. Perhaps he feared another disappointment for me. She is ill, perhaps, or in trouble. Gretchen may be separated from her young mistress. Crafton has gone to Edinburgh to look for them. I cannot remain here idle, a prey to doubts and fears. He should have told me, and permitted me to accompany him. As it is, I shall follow him in the morning."

He adhered to this resolution. When the Scotch mail quitted the London terminus the next morning, the young earl of Glenham took his place in a first-class coach as a passenger to Edinburgh.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION.

Maldred Crafton pursued his journey to Edinburgh, serenely unsuspicious of the Earl of Glenham's close pursuit. He did not dream that his lordship had actually obtained a clew to the authorship of the letter he had received from Scotland, and believed his own proceedings would remain secret and unsuspected. He slept little upon that first night after leaving London, his sinister exultation filling his being and quickening all his senses to unusual activity.

He expected to rescue Cecil from her enemies, to win her gratitude, and he determined to make her his wife before his return to town. He knew well that she did not love him, and that she did love Lord Glenham ; he knew well her spirit and resolute will, and that she was not likely, even in gratitude for his timely aid, to marry him.

"But, nevertheless," he said to himself, setting his teeth together in a grim and hard expression, "she shall marry me. I will not take her to Lon-

don, except as my wife. She shall be safely mine before I incur any risk of her meeting Glenham. The countess has offered to dower her handsomely in the event of my marrying her, and I will retire with my wife to my estate and devote myself to the task of winning her heart. If she refuse me at first, as I am sure that she will do, I shall be gentle and patient, but there will be a hand of iron within my glove of velvet. I must be prepared for all emergencies. I must have matters so arranged that I shall not fear her refusal, and also so that she cannot escape. Now to prepare the net which shall so envelope her that all her struggles will but tighten her bonds !"

He busied himself with schemes and plans, and from the chaos of many crude ideas he evolved at length one that suited him.

"I shall succeed," he muttered, jubilantly. "I have only to be patient and strong. Might will win. Before Glenham ever even suspects that she is really living, she will be lost to him forever. A little marriage-ring will be a gulf between them deeper and crueller than death."

He had purchased his ticket to Edinburgh only to blind the earl as to his actual destination. When he arrived at the Scottish Athens, he booked himself afresh to Iverness, and sped onwards to the northward without an hour's delay.

At Inverness he was obliged to remain over night. Soon after daybreak upon the following morning, he procured a strong saddle-horse, and minute

instructions as to his course, and set out upon the latter portion of his journey.

In spite of all his caution, however, he lost his way, and wandered for hours upon a road that finally brought him back to Inverness in an angry mood. Determined to no longer trust to his own guidance, he procured a stout carriage adapted to Highland travel, and drawn by two stout Highland ponies. Into this vehicle he packed hampers of provisions, such as he deemed suitable to his own use or to the comfort of Miss Rosse. Finally, he secured as driver a Highlander who knew the country well, and who undertook to convey him safely and speedily to the MacDougal homestead.

He set out again at a late hour of that afternoon, journeyed until late in the evening, and halted for the night at a little Highland inn of the most primitive description.

He was awake at dawn, breakfasted soon after, and then re-entered his vehicle, and resumed his journey.

It was upon the morning of this day that Mr. Pulford quitted the ruined site of the MacDougal homestead, exulting in the supposed death of Miss Rosse and her servant.

Although Pulford beheld the approach of Crafton in time to hide himself and his horse among the wayside bushes, where he lurked, watching with baleful eyes as Crafton passed, Crafton did not see or suspect the hostile presence. He looked from his carriage window, in a fever of impatience and

anxiety, and hurried on in the direction of the hamlet which Pulford had so recently quitted.

He had scarcely passed the spot where Cecil's enemy lurked in sinister triumph, when he drew from his pocket Gretchen's letter and perused it anew with eagerness.

"I must be almost at my journey's end," he muttered. "We must be in the neighborhood of the MacDougal place. I am doubtless upon the threshold of an adventure. This mysterious letter hints of a secret enemy who has held both mistress and servant prisoners for months, of terrible and deadly foes who seek Miss Rosse's life, of pursuers on their track, and implores me to come to their rescue. The letter looks like the production of a mad woman, at first sight, but it confirms my theory of the mysterious unknown. By Jove, I was right. The man who took the child Cecil to the pastor's house in the Black Forest is trying now to destroy her life! What if he should have succeeded? What if I should arrive too late?"

He ordered the coachman to drive faster.

Presently his thoughts took a new turn.

"I have gained the clew which we all have sought so long and vainly," he said to himself. "I am near Miss Rosse—the girl I worship. I—and I alone of all those so deeply interested in her—know her whereabouts. In an hour more I expect to stand face to face with her, if her scoundrel enemy has not succeeded in killing her!"

The coachman pushed his horses to their best speed.

Half an hour later the little mountain hamlet was in full view.

"The MacDougal place is just beyond the hamlet, sir," said the driver, leaning down from his box. "I ken it weel. Nae use to stop for inquiries. I can tak' ye direct to the hoose."

They pressed onward, passing through the hamlet at a good rate of speed. The carriage proceeded more slowly as it neared the site of the MacDougal homestead, and it finally drew up before it.

Crafton, thrusting his head from the window, stared aghast at the scene of devastation that lay spread before his eyes.

Where the old farmhouse had stood lay ashes and smouldering embers from which a faint smoke still rose. The solitary, massive chimney stood like a sentinel from the midst of the desolation, making it yet more desolate. A few pieces of furniture were still in the yard. A score of Highlanders, men and women, including the MacDougal family, were wandering about disconsolately, or raking among the ashes.

"This be the MacDougal place, sir," said the driver, wonderingly, "but the hoose is nae here. There hae been a fire—"

Crafton opened the door of the vehicle and leaped to the ground. The Highlanders regarded him keenly as he approached them rapidly.

"Is this the MacDougal place?" he demanded, looking from one to the other of the group.

"It is, sir," was the response.

"Where is Mr. MacDougal?"

The farmer came forward with a bow, his stolid visage indicating surprise.

"I see that your house is burned down," remarked Crafton, in a tone of sympathy. "When did it happen?"

"Last night, sir," replied the farmer. "As ye maun see, it is still smoking."

"I am very sorry," said Crafton, politely. "I came here, Mr. MacDougal, in answer to a letter which I received from a German serving-woman, Gretchen Heinrich. She informed me that I should find her and her young mistress, Miss Rosse, at your house. I am Mr. Crafton—Maldred Crafton!"

The farmer retreated a step, regarding his visitor in amazement.

"You, Mr. Crafton!" he ejaculated, incredulously.

"Yes, I. Did you not expect to see me here? What surprises you in my appearance?"

"Mr. Crafton was here last night; he left us not o'er twa hours ago—"

"Mr. Crafton! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, sir, that Mr. Crafton cam' here last night an' slept in this hoose, an' took his parritch wi' me this morning at a neebor's."

"There is some strange mistake here." exclaimed Crafton, after a brief, amazed silence. "I am Maldred Crafton. And here is Gretchen's letter to me in confirmation of my identity."

He displayed the letter and envelope. The farmer examined both, and gave particular attention to the post-mark.

"That is the letter, sure," he said, scratching his

head in a manner indicative of perplexity. "I recognize the paper an' the envelope, whilk I gave mysel' to the serving woman ye mention. An' there is the Loch Low post-mark. Yes, that is the letter. The ither mon had nae letter He gave nae proofs; but then the dochther knew him, an' he knew the dochther. It's a poozzle."

"A man came here last night and personated me?" exclaimed Crafton. "This is singular. I left London immediately on receipt of this letter No one knew that I had received it—at least, no one dreamed of its contents. What did the man who claimed my name look like?"

"He was a big mon, wi' a florid face, an' sma' gray eyes, an' a lang, sandy beard—a smooth sort o' man, wi' a plausible manner," said the farmer, reflectively. "We liket him vera weel, vera weel indeed."

Crafton racked his brain in the endeavor to think of some person of his acquaintance answering this description. His mind reverted to his suspicions of Lady Trevor's connection with Miss Rosse's disappearance, and he thought of Pulford.

"I know of only one man answering your description," he remarked, "a gentleman named Pulford—"

"That was the vera name the auld woman ca'ed him!" interrupted MacDougal. "Pulford! She wad hae that he was nae Mr. Crafton at a', but that he was Pulford!"

"Pulford! It was he, then? I was right in my suspicions of Lady Trevor!" ejaculated Crafton. "The whole affair is, then, the result of a woman's

jealousy! Pulford was here—he left this morning! Where is Miss Rosse?"

MacDougal pointed sorrowfully to the smouldering embers and ashes before them.

"Good heaven! You don't mean—"

"The young lady an' her servant were burned oop i' the fire last night!" exclaimed the farmer, solemnly.

Crafton recoiled, his face white as death, his eyes glittering like burning coals.

Mrs. MacDougal and her daughters, who were close beside the farmer, broke forth into pitiful expressions of their grief.

Crafton tried to speak, but only a husky murmur escaped his throat. He staggered back a step, sank down upon a rude chair that stood near, and leaning forward, covered his face with his hands.

Cecil had been almost within his grasp—and now to lose her seemed more than he could bear! Dead! Burned to ashes! Destroyed almost in the hour of his coming! An awful wave of bitterness and agony swept over his soul. A murderous passion filled his being! He would hasten after Pulford and kill him, for Pulford must have killed her.

Then came a swift revulsion of feeling. She was not dead! She could not have perished like a bird in its cage!

He sprang up, fiery and determined.

"Tell me all about Pulford's appearance here," he demanded. "Tell me about Miss Rosse, and about the fire. How long was Miss Rosse in your house?"

"Over a week, sir. She cam' the day the auld

woman wrote to ye, sir. The twa rode up thegither on twa used-up ponies an' askit shelter. The young lady dropped doon at the dure in a dead swoon, an' I carrit her into the hoose. She were ill i' her bed for days. The auld woman were ill, too, wi' the fatigue an' the fear. We mad' them welcoom to a' we had. If they were alive noo, they wad tell ye, sir, that the MacDougals treated them kindly."

"Ay, that we did," sobbed Mrs. MacDougal. "An' we never saw a prettier lassie, nor a bonnier, sweeter ane than Miss Rosse! Puir, lost lamb!"

"The next day after Miss Rosse an' her servant cam'," continued the farmer, "there apperit a person ca'ing himself Dochther Graham. He said he kep' a mad-hoose at Incledon, an' that these twa were escaped lunatics, an' previously unbeknown to each ither—"

"He lied, then!" interrupted Crafton.

"I heered baith sides," said MacDougal, "an' I tauld the young lady, if her story were true, that her frien's wad coom for her an' the dochther maun wait until we could hear frae Lunnon i' answer to Gretchen's letter. Yester e'en, the mon ca'ing himself Crafton appearit, an' confairmed the story o' the dochther. It was settlet that Miss Rosse an' the auld woman should gae wi' the dochther this morning. Gretchen saw the mon, but the young lady didna see him at a'. I' the night—I canna tell how it a' happened—but we were awakened by Mr. Pulford creeing 'Fire!' We had barely time enoo to get oot o' dures, wi' the few puir sticks ye see here, when the roof fell in, an' the wa's followed, an' the

young lady an' her servant were buried i' the ruins."

"Pulford must have set the house on fire to destroy her!" ejaculated Crafton.

"He gav' me a hoonder poonds as a free gift toward rebuildin' the hoose."

"That confirms my idea. He gave you that sum to recompense the loss he had caused you. He wished you no harm and he believed his purpose accomplished. Are you quite sure that the two women were burned?"

"Quite sure, sir. We should hae been burned to ashes oursels but for Mr. Pulford. The women could na escapit."

"Have you searched for bones among the ashes?"

"Ay, an' found nane. The banes must a been burnt as weel."

Crafton looked unconvinced.

"I think some fragment of bone must have remained to show their fate," he declared. "See, there are bits of burning beams smoking among the ashes. All trace of two human beings could not, I think, be so utterly lost. If it be indeed so, if these helpless women were burned alive by that man's devilish malignity, he shall hang higher than Haman! All Britain shall ring with his infamy and with that of the woman who has employed him to destroy her rival. They shall expiate their crimes with their lives!"

He raised his arm in fierce denunciation, his swarthy face pale and set in a stony sort of despair, his eyes burning with a lurid flame.

THEY BEHELD CECIL ROSSE AND OLD GRETCHEN.—*See Page* 257.

The little group gathered nearer him, staring at him as if fascinated.

"I will avenge her!" shouted Crafton, his voice ringing loud and clear, while he shook his clenched fist and his eyes flamed with a demoniac fury. "I will destroy them as—great heaven!"

His blazing eyes changed in their expression to a look of amazement, bewilderment and over-mastering joy. He staggered backward a pace, and his long forefinger extended itself from his fist and pointed toward the stable yard.

The gaze of the awe-struck bystanders followed the direction thus indicated.

And they beheld emerging from a small haybarn, and approaching them, two figures—those of Cecil Rosse and old Gretchen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

Yes, the two approaching figures were unmistakably those of Cecil Rosse and old Gretchen !

Both alive ! Both unharmed !

The girl sped forward with swift steps, her young face white as death, her great, red-brown eyes wild and glowing. Her gaze was fixed upon Crafton. The old woman hurried after her with uncertain steps, disheveled hair and livid countenance, her eyes also fixed in a wild gaze upon the new-comer.

Mrs. MacDougal uttered a cry of terror, and sat down hastily.

The simple Highland neighbors retreated a few steps, half in superstitious dismay, as if they feared they looked upon disembodied souls.

Even MacDougal himself stood dumb and awe-stricken, unable to utter a word, his eyes staring incredulously.

Crafton was, for one moment, as if turned to stone. Then his arm dropped to his side, and he bounded forward with an exulting joy stamped upon every quivering feature of his swarthy face. The girl had

reached the outer edge of the group. She paused here at his impetuous approach. He reached her side, and, in his joy, would have embraced her but that she recalled him to his senses by extending her hand with a sweet, girlish dignity tempering the warmth of her glad welcome.

"Miss Rosse!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand and carrying it to his lips. "Thank God! you are alive and well? They told me you were dead!"

"It's not the fault of our enemies that we are not dead!" cried old Gretchen, sobbing aloud in her delight. "Oh, Mr. Crafton, I feared that you had not received that letter—that you were not coming to us!"

Crafton wrung Cecil's hand in his fervent pressure, and a tear dropped from his eye upon it. She leaned more heavily against him. He regarded her anxiously. Her face was whiter than any snow-drift. Her joy and relief were too much for her, after hours of terror and anguish, and a deadly faintness had seized upon her.

With the tenderness of a woman, Crafton lifted her in his arms and carried her to the huge, high-backed, wooden settle that had been rescued on the previous night from the burning house. He laid her upon it. The Highland women, recovered from their superstitious fears, brought their plaids to cover her. A man hurried to the nearest house for restoring drinks. Mrs. MacDougal and her daughters gathered about the young girl, and chafed her hands, and ministered to her.

Cecil presently revived and sat up, her face still

white, her eyes supernaturally large, her counte nance radiant with her gladness. She held out he hand anew to Crafton, to whom she had not ye spoken.

"Let me thank you," she said, brokenly. "You have saved our lives. Our enemies—"

"Are gang!" interrupted Mrs. MacDougal.

"Gone!"

"Gang!" echoed Elspeth MacDougal. "Gang their separate ways, ane of them to the east, an' the ither to the west!"

"But if they were here they would not dare to harm you, Miss Cecil, now that I am here to defend you," said Crafton. "You are no longer helpless and defenceless—"

"Thanks be to heaven!" interrupted Gretchen.

"We thocht ye were burnt alive i' the hoose, Miss," said Mrs. MacDougal.

"Did our enemies think so too?" asked Cecil, eagerly.

"They did. They hae gang awa' to spread the ill news."

MacDougal came forward, his Scottish countenance set in an expression of severity and stern reproach.

"We hae a' mourned ye as dead, Miss," he exclaimed. "We believed ye had perished i' the fire. Your enemies were deceived, like ourselves. Whether ye were mad or nay, I wad ask ye, hae ye made a proper return for our kindness to ye baith? Ye cam' here ill an' tired; we took ye in, according to the wards of Holy Scriptures; we mad' ye wel-

coom ; we gav' ye the best chamber i' the hoose, the best linen, the best food ; the guid-wife ministered to ye ; my dochthers tended ye lik' servants—an' this is our reward !"

He pointed with an indescribable bitterness at the lonely chimney and the gray ashes that were all that remained of his once prosperous and hospitable home.

"I am very sorry," said Cecil, in a faltering voice.

"Ye should have been sorra beforehand," cried the farmer, with an outbreak of passion. "Why should ye burn us oot o' hoose and hame ? It is a maircy we escapit wi' our lives !"

"An' my beds, an' linen, an' dishes, an' furniture all burned oop !" said Mrs. MacDougal, in a burst of housewifely grief. "An' a' the guid homespun, an' the best claithes—it is vera hard. Ye were sore temptit, I doot na, Miss, but it were a hard thing to do."

Cecil looked from one to the other of her accusers, with a dawning comprehension of their meaning.

"Do you mean to accuse me of setting fire to your house ?" she demanded, a red spot burning on either cheek, her manner showing haughty surprise.

"An' did ye nae ?" demanded Elspeth.

"I did not. How can you dream that I would do such a thing ?"

"It wad hae been the foreign woman, then ?"

"It was neither of us. We do not know how the fire originated."

"The man Jarvis may have set the house on fire," said Gretchen.

"How did you escape, Miss Rosse?" inquired Crafton.

"Gretchen came up to me last evening and told me that Mr. Pulford, Lady Trevor's agent, was below in the farmhouse kitchen. She said that he called himself Mr. Crafton, and that the MacDougal family believed his pretensions. She said that he had corroborated Jarvis' story, declared him to be a doctor, and us two escaped madwomen. She said that the MacDougals had consented to our removal from the house this morning by these two men, and that there was no hope for us. She had discovered, too, that Mr. Pulford was the secret enemy to whom we owed our long imprisonment, and who had schemed against our lives. We dared not remain in the house over night. We determined to hurry away as soon as possible. We dressed ourselves in our warmest garments, and removed the barricades softly from the door, and listened and waited. We heard Mr. Pulford go up to his room; we heard Jarvis ascend to his. And then we took off our shoes and left our chamber, and crept down the stairs to the kitchen. And there we waited and listened again, our hearts in our throats. The house-door was open. The servants had retired. The family were in the adjoining rooms, talking among themselves, and procuring beds and blankets. We seized our opportunity, and slipped out of the house unheard and unseen, and ran to the stableyard. We waited there a few minutes, undecided what to do.

Finally we decided that we must obtain our ponies. We should not be able to walk to Inverness, and if we attempted to do so, our enemies would surely overtake us. We dared not attempt to secure the ponies until the household should be asleep. We dared not go to any house in the hamlet. We could only rely upon ourselves."

Mrs. MacDougal uttered a groan of sympathy.

"We were near the little hay-barn," continued Cecil, "and the door was open. We slipped in, climbed the ladder, and crept upon the top of the hay and hid ourselves. A crack between the boards commanded a view of the house. We waited there until the lights in the lower part of the house had been extinguished, but the lights upstairs still burned and we dared not stir. At last, those lights were put out, and then we began to think of flight. We talked in whispers together. We were about to climb down the ladder when some instinct compelled me to take a final look at the house to assure myself that all was safe. I peeped out. The house was all ablaze!"

"I kenned she never set fire to the hoose!" cried Mrs. MacDougal.

"We were frightened, and hid again in the hay," said Cecil. "And there we stayed throughout the long and terrible night. We dared not show ourselves, lest we should be discovered. Toward morning, being quite worn out, we dropped asleep. When we awakened it was broad day, and Mr. Pulford and Jarvis were raking among the ashes. We feared lest they should detect us at the crack

between the board, and we dared not look out often. We resolved to lie hidden until to-night, and then to make an effort to escape. But we heard your voice Mr. Crafton, and we looked out and saw you, and in the joy of the moment we sprang up and hurried down the ladder, and ran towards you—"

"You knew that I would protect you with my life!" cried Crafton. "And you were right. Before harm shall come to you, Miss Rosse, it will have to cross my dead body!"

"It maun be that the fire was then an accident," said Mr. MacDougal. "Or the wark of Mr. Pulford, or the mon Jairvis."

"It was no accident!" declared Crafton. "It was the result of a deep and hellish design to destroy two innocent lives."

"God be thanked that that design was nae successful!" said the farmer, devoutly.

"An' noo," said the kindly neighbor who had given the MacDougal women lodgings during the past night, and had entertained the entire MacDougal family, with Pulford and Jarvis, at breakfast, "the young lady an' the auld woman are clean tired out an' ill wi' fasting. Bring them to my hoose. We hae enoo an' till spare. Coom, a' o' ye' an' hae a hot breakfast!"

"Take my arm, Miss Cecil," said Crafton, gently. "Lean upon me. You cannot do better than to accept this kind invitation."

Cecil rose up, trembling, but with a wan smile.

"First," said Mr. MacDougal, coming forward, "let me ask the young lady's pardon for dooting

her ward an' helping her enemies to oppress her. I see it a' noo. An' sin' ye vouch for her reason, Mr. Crafton, I tak' back a' I hae said aboot her an' the auld woman, an' a' I hae I place at her sairvice. She can hae the harses—"

"Thank you," interrupted Crafton, "but she will not need them. I thank you, in her name, for your offers of service, and, in her name, pardon all that has passed. I know her too well to believe that she will bear a grudge for your unbelief, since you repent it. I shall take Miss Rosse away with me this morning!"

He drew Cecil's arm in his, ordered his driver to proceed to the next house, and followed the guidance of the hospitable neighbor.

Gretchen and the MacDougals followed.

A wide kitchen settle heaped with plaids was placed at Cecil's disposal while the women of the family prepared oat-meal porridge and oat-meal cakes, with other Scottish dishes. Crafton went out to his carriage and returned with half the contents of his hamper of provisions, coffee, tea and sugar, a tin of biscuits, and various other delcacies. The neighbors brought the best from their larders, and steaming broiled birds, ham and venison presently filled the kitchen with their savory, commingling odors. Coffee was made, not only for the guests, but for the entire curious group of neighbors, to whom the beverage was a novelty. Cecil and Crafton sat down at the table and were served by a dozen willing hands. Gretchen insisted upon sitting apart at a side-table, where more freedom in satisfying

the demands of her capacious appetite was allowed her.

When the meal was concluded, and the strong coffee and well-cooked viands had imparted new strength to Cecil, they arose from the table.

Crafton presented his entertainers with the remains of his stores and won their fervent gratitude. He drew MacDougal aside, and, in the exuberance of his joy, presented him twenty pounds towards rebuilding his house.

And then, the horses having been fed and watered and rubbed down, and put again to the carriage, Cecil made her adieux to the MacDougal family. Mrs. MacDougal and her daughters shed tears and entreated forgiveness for giving credence to Pulford's assertions, and Cecil kissed all three of the women in token of her kindly feeling toward them. She shook hands with the farmer and his sons, and with the neighbors who betrayed their interest in her by crowding about her. And then Mr. Crafton helped her into the vehicle, handed in Gretchen, and followed, taking his place beside the German woman, with his back to the horses.

The driver cracked his whip, the horses started briskly, and the carriage rolled out of the yard into the highway.

Cecil put out her head for a last look at the kindly faces of the simple Highland people and waved her hand in a final farewell. Then she sank back upon the cushions, and was borne past the little hamlet, and on the road to Inverness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE MOUNTAIN INN.

Crafton arranged a shawl as a pillow and placed it under Cecil's head. She closed her eyes wearily, faint and wan after her long fatigue and excitement, and he watched her with adoring eyes.

He noticed, as the transitory flush left her cheeks, how pale and thin was the lovely young face. Her exquisite beauty was undimmed, the tender mouth had lost nothing of its sweetness, but the long, curling eye-lashes lay upon her cheek like snow, and the red-brown hair, with its golden shimmer, rippled away from brows upon which the blue veins stood out with startling effect. The slender figure had grown strangely ethereal. A thrill of tenderness went through Crafton's soul as he gazed upon her, and a sudden moisture dimmed his hard, black eyes.

"You are safe now, Miss Cecil," he said, softly. "Those wretches cannot harm you now, even if we were to meet them face to face."

The girl breathed with a long, deep sigh.

"Where are we going now?" asked old Gretchen.

"To Inverness, on our way to London. We shall arrive at Inverness to-night, and take the morning train for London."

"We shall be glad to get back to London, shall we not, Miss Cecil?" cried Gretchen, joyously. "We shall go back to our old rooms in Queen's Crescent, and Mrs. Thomas will welcome us, and we shall feel quite at home, shall we not?"

Cecil smiled faintly.

"We owe our safety to you, Mr. Crafton," declared Gretchen, warmly. "But for you we should have been still hiding in that barn, hungry, cold and terrified. But for you we might have been discovered there before night and held as prisoners, while the MacDougals sent after Mr. Pulford or Jarvis to return for us. You are the only friend we have in all the wide world!"

Crafton bent forward toward Cecil, his face flushing.

"If Miss Cecil will but believe me her best friend, I shall be quite content," he said, softly.

Cecil opened her weary eyes and looked at him gratefully.

"Do not think me ungrateful because I have not expressed my gratitude in words, Mr. Crafton," she said, gently. "I thank you from my soul for your great kindness in hastening to us at Gretchen's appeal. If you could but know the delicious sense of safety and restfulness I feel at this moment, you would feel repaid for your generous goodness."

"I am repaid—more than repaid!" declared Craf-

ton, fervently. "I would gladly die to serve you, Miss Cecil. Think no more of gratitude. Do not feel that I deserve your thanks. I wish that you would consider that you have a sacred claim upon my protection, and that in permitting me to serve you, you do me a great favor."

"You are very kind—"

"For months, Miss Cecil, I have mourned you as dead!" cried Crafton, in an impassioned voice. "A day or two after you left London, I called at your lodgings in Bayswater, and were told that you had quitted town, that you were gone to Yorkshire, to Lady Trevor's country-house. I went to Yorkshire; you had not been there. I returned to London, half frantic. I employed detectives to search for you. I went to Zorlitz, but no one there could throw any light upon your disappearance. I visited every station on the line to Greycourt. I searched hospitals, asylums, every place in which I fancied you might have found refuge. I visited intelligence offices; I went to all the great cities of the continent; I followed a strange woman over nearly all Europe, in the hope of finding you—"

"What devotion!" breathed Gretchen.

"And I had made up my mind that you were dead, Cecil, when Gretchen's letter came, raising me from despair to the sublimest heights of joy! I have found you at last. You are safe and well; and I am the happiest man in the kingdom!"

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it passionately. Cecil drew away hastily, her face reddening.

"And while I mourned you as dead, the victim of some awful fatality, you were a prisoner in a lonely house on the Scottish coast," pursued Crafton. "I visited the railway stations and questioned the guards. How could I have missed you? Did you leave London on the night of the day on which you left Bayswater?"

"Yes," assented Cecil, "but we did not leave by train. Lady Trevor kindly offered us free passage on her yacht, which, she said, was about to sail for Greycourt. We drove to Gravesend in the cab, and Mr. Pulford put us on board the yacht—"

"The yacht? We never thought of that!" said Crafton, excitedly; "The yacht? It was on the west coast at that time. They must have procured another vessel than the *Undine*."

"We suspected no evil," said Cecil. "We were several days at sea, but we attributed the long passage to the bad weather. We were landed at a place called Black Rock, on the extreme northwest coast of Scotland, as Mrs. MacDougal told me—a wild and desolate spot in a terrible, frozen region. And there we remained all the long winter, I sewing upon the moth-eaten tapestry, which I restored, and never suspecting that we were, in reality, prisoners, and that Jarvis and his wife, and the Portuguese woman, Maria, were really our jailers!"

"You were the victims of a frightful conspiracy, and Mr. Pulford was only the instrument of another's will. Did these jailers actually attempt your lives?"

Cecil told him of her winter's experiences, of the

long, dreary days of toil in the remote northern eyrie, of her walks with Gretchen, attended by Maria, and of the terrible discovery her old servant had made upon that awful night of Gretchen's visit to the kitchen. She narrated, in shuddering tones, the events that had followed, her own visit to the kitchen, the conversation she had overheard, the discovery of herself and Gretchen by her enemies, her narrow escape from death upon that night, the long subsequent imprisonment, the attempted murder, and the thrilling incidents of her escape from the old house of Black Rock, and her wanderings thereafter.

"Now you know all," she said, when she had concluded. "Gretchen thought that Mr. Pulford might have some connection with the man who brought me to Zorlitz. Mr. Pulford certainly hired Jarvis and his companions to destroy me."

"He was the instrument employed by a jealous woman to get you out of her way," said Crafton. "That woman was Lady Trevor."

"But I never harmed her—"

"You came between her and her fondest ambitions. She is past her first youth, and she beheld in you a young girl, beautiful as a vision, and she feared you. When she quarreled with her lover," said Crafton, calling to his assistance the lie he had invented months before, "and sent him from her, he went with me to the Black Forest on a hunting expedition ; he met you and was charmed with your beauty and sweetness. How could he have helped being so ? He believed that he loved you—pardon

me, Miss Cecil, if I wound your feelings, but I must tell the story correctly. It is time that you heard the whole truth. He asked the old pastor's consent to pay his addresses to you. Herr Brocken told him the story of your origin. The earl is very proud; he could not marry a woman of unknown birth, not if the woman were Venus herself. He hastened back to England, determined to conquer his passion for you. He went to his hunting-box in Scotland. Lady Trevor was at Castle Cliff, Lord St. Leonards' hunting-seat, only five miles distant from his own place. They met again and again, and, as might have been expected, made up their quarrel and renewed their engagement of marriage. But Lady Trevor is a jealous person. She could not forgive Lord Glenham for permitting his affections to wander to you. She regarded you as her rival and hated you."

The girl's proud, sweet mouth quivered.

"Still, why should she kill me?" she asked.

"You had come between her and her love. Then, Lord St. Leonards saw you and fell in love with you, in a fatherly sort of way, and was anxious to adopt you. You reminded him of some one he had known, perhaps, and he was determined to find you, and avowed his intention of making you his heiress in place of his granddaughter, Lady Trevor. The widow feared that you would cut her out of her expected legacies, and she wanted you removed from her path. If jealousy and baffled greed do not seem sufficient motives for her attempts at murder, remember that she is no well-principled person, but

a dangerous, terrible woman, whose will has been her law all her life long. She is hard, selfish and unscrupulous, a thoroughly wicked woman, who will scruple at no crime to attain her purposes, if that crime can be worked out in secret without fear of detection."

"And it is such a woman that Lord Glenham loves?"

"He does not know her as you and I do. Love is blind, you know."

Cecil's face drooped to her pillow. Her quivering features showed her agitation at the mention of Lord Glenham's name.

"I suppose," said Gretchen, "that no one but you searched for Miss Cecil, Mr. Crafton?"

"No one but me and the detectives I employed. Who else was there to search?"

"Who indeed?" said Cecil, sorrowfully. "Did—did Lord Glenham learn of my disappearance?"

"Yes, I told him. He was sorry, of course, and he wished me success in my search, but he was too occupied with his own concerns to assist me."

"When is he to be married?" asked Gretchen.

Crafton glanced at the girl's half-hidden face. He knew that she loved Glenham with all her young soul. He knew that she was listening in a breathless agony for his answer. He determined to cut short at once any possibly lingering hope she might entertain, and answered:

"Lord Glenham and Lady Trevor are married. The wedding occurred last week in London."

There was a little trembling of the girl's figure,

but no exclamation, nor sign of grief. Cecil hid her sorrow bravely in her own heart, as something too sacred for others' eyes to behold. Yet the pitying angels, knowing all her anguish, all the bitterness of her despair, must have wept for her in that hour of supreme agony and desolation.

"Married?" said Gretchen. "He is married?"

"And to Lady Trevor!" affirmed Crafton. "Lady Glenham, the dowager countess, is delighted with her new daughter-in-law. And Lord St. Leonards was present at the ceremony and gave away the bride. He presented her with the St. Leonards family diamonds, and showed conclusively that he was on the best of terms with her at last!"

The old woman groaned heavily as she glanced at her young mistress.

"Perhaps, as Lady Trevor has made sure of both lover and fortune, she may let Miss Cecil alone now!" she muttered.

"No one shall ever harm Miss Rosse again while I live," said Crafton, earnestly. "I shall make her safety and happiness my chief care!"

Cecil hid her face in her shawl and was silent. Crafton became thoughtful, and brooded exultantly over his success.

He had found Miss Rosse! She was in his charge! He had persuaded her that Lord Glenham was lost to her forever!

"And now," he said to himself, "it will be easy to persuade her to become my wife! But if she

refuses, I will try force! Mine she shall be within a week!"

He set his teeth together in a hard and grim expression that augured ill for Cecil's future in case she opposed his will.

They rode on for some hours, arriving about the middle of the afternoon at the little mountain inn at which Crafton had spent the preceding night.

Here they alighted. The horses were driven around to the stable, while Miss Rosse and Gretchen were shown up to a private room adjoining the lady's parlor.

Crafton ordered a good dinner—the best the house afforded—and after a little chat with the landlord, a tall, raw-boned Highlander, walked up to the parlor. It was unoccupied. The day was unusually warm for the season, and the quaint, old-fashioned windows were open at the bottom, and the home-made curtains, with netted fringe, swayed in the soft breeze.

Crafton sat down at the window and looked out. In front of the inn was a wide court-yard open to the highway. A tall wooden pump and watering-trough occupied a prominent place in the foreground. But it was not at these features that Crafton looked. He was thinking of his success so far in his villainous course, and was occupied with his schemes to compel Cecil's obedience in case of her resistance to his will.

"I have gone too far to back out now," he thought. "There is no turning back. She must be mine! How gloriously beautiful she is! This

mad love of mine for her has received new force and impetus. I would sell my soul to win her love! Patience! Patience! And all I ask for will be mine!"

A maid entered to lay the table. Before she had finished her task, the door of the inner room opened and Cecil came out, pale and sorrowful, but with a brave look on her young face, and a brave smile on her lips. She approached him and held out both her hands, and thanked him anew warmly for his kindness in coming so promptly to her aid.

Crafton placed a chair for her. Gretchen sat down at a window. The maid brought in the well-cooked dinner, and placed it upon the table. The repast was tempting, comprising brook-trout, game-birds and domestic fowls, and Crafton selected the choicest tid-bits for Miss Rosse's plate. He waited upon her with assiduous care, yet unobtrusively, foreseeing her wants, and keeping up a pleasant chat about the country and his visit to Zorlitz, and giving Miss Rosse and Gretchen the score of kind messages which had been sent to them by the people of Zorlitz, to be delivered in the event of their discovery.

"We will resume our journey after an hour's rest," said Crafton, when they had finished their meal, Gretchen, who had been served at a side-table, included. "The time is nearly up. Had you not better sit down a few moments before we set out again, Miss Rosse? You do not look able to stand so long a journey."

"I am stronger than I look," replied Cecil. "I

am impatient to be again on the way. It is only when I am in motion that I can feel that I am really safe."

"The horses are rested. If you will put on your bonnet and wraps, we will get under way."

Miss Rosse and Gretchen retired to the inner room.

"I shall put my fate to the test before reaching Inverness," thought Crafton. "This afternoon shall decide her future and mine! Hark! What is that?"

The clatter of a horse's hoofs had reached his ears. He went to the window and looked out carelessly. He started back upon the instant with an oath. A horseman had just halted at the watering-trough in the yard below, and was eagerly questioning the hostler. This horseman, as Crafton recognized, to his utter horror and dismay, was the young Earl of Glenham.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DECLARATION OF LOVE.

The consternation of Crafton, as he beheld Lord Glenham in front of the lonely mountain inn in the Scottish Highlands, was too great for description. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. He had left the young earl in London. What had brought him here, so close upon his own track? Had the earl discovered his perfidy? Did he know that Miss Rosse was living—was here?

Crafton concealed himself, by a rapid movement, behind one of the window-curtains, and held his breath, while he stared at the horseman below in a wild excitement and alarm.

The tones of Lord Glenham's voice floated up to his ears. He could not distinguish the earl's words, but he fancied that they formed an inquiry in regard to himself. He strained his hearing to catch the hostler's answer, and breathed more freely as he heard the man say loudly:

"The road to Loch Low is straight ahead, sir. Turn neither to the right nor to the left, an' ye'll fetch up at the hoose o' MacDougal."

Lord Glenham allowed his horse to satisfy his thirst at the trough, and then drew the animal's head up abruptly, and moved on a few paces, as he said :

"Did a gentleman travelling in a post-chaise pass here last night ?"

"A gentleman on his way to Loch Low ? Ay, sir, he stoppit here the night, an' went on his way i' the marnin'."

Crafton drew his breath hard.

Would the hostler volunteer the information that the gentleman had returned quite recently, with a young lady and her servant in his charge, and that the party were at that very moment within the inn ? Would the earl elicit the fact by further questioning ?

A rustling sound in the inner room aroused new terrors within him. If Cecil should return to the parlor, should hear Lord Glenham's voice, or chance to look from the window and see him, all would be lost.

A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. His legs trembled beneath him. A strange dizziness seized upon him.

But the success that had attended him so far in his wicked schemes did not desert him now. Cecil did not enter the parlor. And further inquiries on the part of Lord Glenham, and further communications on the part of the hostler, were frustrated by the appearance of the landlord upon the scene. He came out into the yard, greeting the earl respectfully, and proffering the hospitalities of his house.

"I may stop on my return to-morrow," said the earl. "Just now I am in haste. I must reach the MacDougal place before nightfall."

He tossed a coin to the hostler, bowed to the landlord, and touched up his horse, riding away upon the road leading to Loch Low at a good rate of speed.

Crafton watched him out of sight with blank amaze, standing like a statue by the window.

"What brought him here?" he asked himself.

"He must have seen the signature of Gretchen's letter when he picked it up and handed it to me in my chambers. But why did he not accuse me of double-dealing on the spot? Why did he not call me a traitor and demand explanations? He attended me to the station and went home. But he must have started on my track the next day. It would have been easy for him to track me to Inverness, and thence to Loch Low. I have left a distinct trail behind me—curse my stupidity."

He conceived a theory nearly in accordance with the facts of the case.

Lord Glenham had arrived at Edinburgh and had searched the hotel registers for Crafton's name. After losing a day in vain inquiries, he returned to the railway station and interrogated the cabman who awaited the arrivals of the trains, the guards and station-masters. To his great surprise, he discovered that a gentleman answering precisely to the description he gave of Crafton, and who was beyond a shadow of doubt his kinsman, had proceeded to Inverness, after only an hour's delay at Edinburgh.

Accordingly the earl followed with all convenient speed.

It was late in the evening when he arrived at Inverness. He secured lodgings at the Station Hotel, ascertained that Crafton had not been seen there, and, late as was the hour, procured a cab and went forth upon an exploring expedition.

At none of the principal hotels could he obtain a clew to the movements of the man he sought. He returned to his lodgings, where he passed a restless and sleepless night, his mind occupied with the strange problems apparent to the reader.

Upon the following morning, after breakfast, he resumed his tour of investigation. He visited the house at which Crafton had spent the night after his arrival, and not only discovered his kinsman's recent presence there, but ascertained that Crafton had procured a carriage and had set out on the previous day for Loch Low.

Too impatient to await at Inverness the schemer's return, he procured a horse and full instructions, and set out also for Loch Low.

The possibility that Crafton might return to Inverness that day did not occur to him. He could not suppose that his kinsman would make a stay of but a single hour with the MacDougals, after so long a journey. He had no doubt but that he should find him at the farmhouse, and was therefore all eagerness to press forward.

When the earl had passed beyond the range of the traitor's vision, Crafton drew a long breath of relief,

as if an immense burden of apprehension and anxiety had been removed from his soul.

"We must be off at once!" he muttered. "What a frightful risk of discovery I have run! If he were to meet some one who has seen us, he would turn back and find us here. We must not delay a moment longer!"

He descended to the bar-parlor, found the landlord, paid his bill, and ordered his chaise to be brought around immediately.

Then he returned to the parlor up stairs.

He found Miss Rosse and old Gretchen, wearing bonnets and wraps, awaiting his return.

He smoothed his anxious brows and informed Cecil that the chaise waited. The rumble of wheels confirmed his statement. He offered her his arm, and led her down to the court-yard, just as the vehicle drew up before the door. Crafton helped Cecil in and piled shawls and rugs about her, and then handed in Gretchen.

"Now we're off," he said cheerfully, springing into the chaise and slamming the door. "An extra half sovereign, Jarvy, if you get us to Inverness to-night and in good time!"

The driver responded by starting his horses briskly, and the chaise rolled out of the court-yard, the landlord and the hostler, with all the supernumeraries belonging to the establishment, coming out to witness the departure.

Cecil sank back among her impromptu cushions and was silent.

Crafton put his head out of the window with

singular frequency and looked back, but he saw nothing of Lord Glenham. His good fortune was, as usual, in the ascendant.

"I've escaped that peril by the merest chance," he thought, with a shudder. "Another question on Glenham's part, another minute's delay, even to listen to that hostler, and the fact of my presence at the inn, with Miss Rosse, would have been discovered! Who would have dreamed of Glenham's appearance here? Well, I am upon my guard now; I will be prepared for him."

Flinging aside his anxiety and care, he exerted himself to make the journey less tedious to his young charge. He told her of his winter's search for her, carefully avoiding to state that Lord Glenham and Lord St. Leonards had joined in that search, and shared in all his anxieties and terrors, and that the earl had done even more than himself in the endeavor to further Cecil's recovery. He rehearsed his interviews with Lady Trevor, and asked many questions in regard to Black Rock and Cecil's jailers there.

"Pulford must have known of that old, deserted house," he commented. "It must have been his idea—shutting you up there. He went on a yachting excursion several years ago with the late Sir Albert Trevor, making a circuit of Scotland, and visiting all the islands in the vicinity. He must at that time have picked up his knowledge of this old haunted house of the Cathcairns, and he has saved the knowledge until now for this infamous use!

He's deep, that Pulford—deeper than I ever gave him credit for!"

"Then Lady Trevor did not own the house at Black Rock, sir?" asked old Gretchen.

"No, indeed. Pulford took possession of it, I don't doubt, without leave or license from any one. It appears, from what MacDougal said, that a tragedy once occurred there, and the house has not been occupied for fifty years, until he, with a pirate's freebooterism, seized upon it. We never thought to watch Pulford. But if we had we should have discovered nothing, I dare say. Such a cunning old fox as he would not be likely to betray himself."

"And you have spent all these months of my captivity in searching for me, Mr Crafton?" said Cecil, wonderingly. "I think I should have been happier if I had known that even one person was looking for me!"

"I have not known one minute's happiness since your disappearance, Miss Cecil," said Crafton, ardently—"until to-day."

The girl's white cheek flushed faintly. She shrank back among her shawls.

"I have devoted all my time and energies to the task of finding you," continued Crafton, unable to control himself longer, giving himself up to the passion that filled his being. "I have had no enjoyment, no satisfaction, no peace since the hour in which I heard of your loss. I have traveled everywhere, by night and by day; have followed up false clews, have left no stone unturned, as I

might say, in my search. And in the hour of my despair, when I said to myself that you must be dead, Gretchen's letter came, and I lived again! I started by the first train, Cecil; I came straight to you, and I found you! You are safe now, Cecil. No one shall harm you again while I live!"

"I knew you would protect my young mistress, sir," sobbed old Gretchen, in her joy at this assurance.

"I will guard her with my life!" declared Crafton, solemnly. "Cecil, since the day I met you in the shadows of the Black Forest, I have loved you. It was not your beauty alone, splendid as it is, that won my admiration. I did not fall in love with you in a fit of pique, nor abandon you when I heard the story of your origin. My love is true and steadfast as eternity! I love you with all my soul—I shall love you always. Lord Glenham is married to Lady Trevor. There is no one to care for you—no one but me. You are tired with your struggle with life, my poor little bird; you have beaten your wings against prison-bars until they are worn and strengthless. You are alone in the world, utterly alone, helpless, friendless, with bitter enemies that seek your life!"

Cecil's lips quivered, but she did not speak.

"Alone, did I say?" cried Crafton. "Helpless? Friendless? No, not while I live! You are not alone while I can defend you! You are not friendless while my heart continues to beat. You are not homeless while I have a roof that I can call my own.

Cecil, accept my love, my care, my devotion, my home! Be my wife!"

He bent toward her and caught her hand in his. His dark face was full of agitation. His black eyes were pleading and anxious and full of ardent love.

Cecil was frightened.

"Mr. Crafton—" she said, trying to draw her hand away.

"Call me Maldred, darling. You must have seen that I love you, Cecil. It was love that made me search all Europe for you—love that brought me to you so promptly at Gretchen's bidding. Cecil, give me the right to protect you always from your enemies. I have a pleasant country home, I have just dismissed my tenant from it; let me take you to it, as my wife!"

"You are very kind, Mr. Crafton," said Cecil, in a troubled, faltering voice. "I suppose I ought to have foreseen this, but I never dreamed of you as a lover. I thought of you as Lord Glenham's friend."

"And so I was until he trifled with your innocent heart and flung it from him like a broken toy. If he had loved you, Cecil, I should have taken my secret down to my grave untold. But he is married to another. Surely you will not wear the willow for him who does not love you, who is the husband of another woman? Reward my love and devotion, Cecil, with your hand in marriage, and let me have the privilege of making your future life safe and happy."

"What can I say? I do not love you, Mr. Crafton—"

"I will undertake to win your love, if you will give me time," urged Crafton.

Cecil twisted her fingers together nervously.

"You force me to tell the truth, Mr. Crafton," she said, brokenly. "In spite of all that has passed, I love Lord Glenham still, with all my soul—"

"Hush, Miss Cecil," interrupted old Gretchen, in a tone of distress and warning. "You know not what you say. It is not maidenly to avow your love for a man who is married to another woman. Besides, he never was betrothed to you."

"Not in words," answered Cecil, her passionate young eyes all aglow; "but he wooed me in the Black Forest as men woo the women they seek to marry. He told my dear uncle, the Herr Pastor of Zorlitz, that he loved me, and wanted me for his wife. We were not betrothed, but if ever eyes spoke love to eyes, his spoke love to mine. If ever soft and loving tones wooed, his wooed me. 'Unmaidenly?' Perhaps I am; for I believed—I believe still—that he loved me then, and I loved him in return. He has learned how to unlove. The story of my birth frightened him from me. But I cannot so easily learn to forget. And how can I become your wife, Mr. Crafton, with this love for him still warm and strong within my heart? I have risked your scorn in telling you all the truth; after your generous avowal I was in honor bound to tell you."

In her girlish shame and despair, Cecil covered her face with her hands.

"I knew, or suspected, all this before," said Crafton, gently, and in a tone of sympathy that soothed

and comforted; "but you have too much self-respect, Cecil, to go on loving another woman's husband. You will outgrow this first love in time, and I shall feel myself happy and honored in winning the calmer love of your riper years. You can make me happy and blessed above all other men. I can smooth the sorrows and troubles from your pathway, if you will allow me. Your respect, your esteem, your kindly regard, will content me until I can win your deeper affection."

"Say 'yes,' Miss Cecil," pleaded old Gretchen. "Do not reject the heart and home and protection Mr. Crafton offers you."

The girl's drooping attitude and downcast eyes and strange pallor did not inspire her lover with a conviction of his success. He continued to urge his cause with ardent pleadings, and Cecil listened with evident pain and shrinking.

"Do not urge me further," she said, at last, in a broken voice. "You are very kind; may God bless and reward you for your goodness to me. But I cannot wrong you by becoming your wife while my heart belongs to another. Nay, hear me out. I cannot wrong myself by marrying where I do not love. It pains me to reward your kindness by this seeming ingratitude, but I cannot, in justice to you or to myself, give you any other answer."

"Oh, Miss Cecil!" sobbed Gretchen.

A spasm of pain convulsed the lovely young face. A dreary look settled upon the tender mouth—a look that pained Crafton to the heart.

"I have spoken too soon!" he said, tenderly.

"Let it be as if I had said nothing, Cecil. I will wait months—years—"

"I can never be your wife, Mr. Crafton," returned Cecil, desolately. "I shall never marry. I have almost decided to go back to Zorlitz, and live and die in the shadow of the Black Forest. I have money enough to buy me a little house, and Gretchen and I will carve wood and train song-birds, and earn enough to satisfy our simple wants—"

"You could never bear such a life as that—never. With your youth, beauty and accomplishments—with your spirit and ambition—to sink into a peasant's bare and hard existence would be impossible!"

"I don't know what I shall do. I am not decided. But I am tired of this hard and terrible world."

"Why will you not let me shelter and befriend you?" asked Crafton. "Am I so utterly repulsive to you?"

"No, no. You know better, Mr. Crafton. The man whom Lord Glenham called his friend is worthy any woman's love, but I have no heart to give you, and I will not wrong you nor myself by giving you my hand when I cannot give you my heart."

Despite her gentleness, there was a firmness in her tone and manner that convinced her suitor that his case was hopeless. The heart that had loved Lord Glenham could never love one of meaner mould. He could have gnashed his teeth in his rage and despair. He put his face to the window and looked out upon the dreary Highland scenery

with stony eyes and livid visage, full of silent wrath and horrible bitterness.

The very difficulties in his way made the prize seem all the more desirable and worth the winning. She would not be his through gentle means; then he would try force. He would make her his wife in spite of her opposition. He would crush her spirit, and compel her to assent to his proposal of marriage. After all that had passed, he could not suffer her to pass out of his keeping and go her own way to tell the story of his treachery, to encounter Lord Glenham, or to attract new suitors, and so be won from him forever. His visage was set in a hard and grim expression, and the gleam of his eyes had in it something terrible. If Cecil could have seen him at that moment, her tender-hearted pity and remorse would have given place to actual terror of him

"Forgive me," she said, softly, troubled at his long silence.

He commanded himself, and turned to her with a sorrowful smile.

"I have nothing to forgive," he said, hypocritically. "I would have been your lover, but you have no heart for me. I accept your rejection of me, Cecil, but if I may not become your husband, at least let me be your friend."

"We will be friends," said Cecil, holding out her hand with frank warmth, her countenance brightening. "If you will accept so poor a thing as the friendship of a nameless girl like me."

"I shall be more honored by your friendship than by that of the queen. Look upon me as your

brother. I cannot leave you at Inverness, exposed to the perils of Pulford's pursuit. I must see you safe again in London at your former lodgings, and then you shall see me only when you will."

Cecil expressed her gratitude, and then the hypocrite again looked from the windows with gleaming eyes.

"She does not suspect the trap I have laid for her," he thought. "I have tried gentle means—now for force! She would not have me as her humble lover—now she shall know me as her master!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PICTURE RECOGNIZED.

Considering the hilly nature of a large share of the road, the post-chaise made very good time indeed, rattling into the streets of Inverness at a late hour of the evening, and drawing up with a grand flourish before the door of the quiet, old-fashioned hostelry which Crafton had before patronized.

A servant came down and opened the door of the vehicle. Crafton sprang out and assisted Miss Rosse to alight. He gave her his arm and helped her up the steps, while old Gretchen clambered out by herself and followed them.

The landlord met them in the hall, and informed them that the rooms Crafton had ordered beforehand to be prepared in expectation of his return, were in readiness for occupancy.

"Lead the way," said Crafton, briefly. "We will follow."

He kept Cecil's arm in his, gently compelling her to lean upon him as they ascended the stair. They were conducted to a pleasant, old-fashioned, wains-

cotted parlor overlooking the street. Two bedrooms adjoined this apartment, one intended for the use of Miss Rosse, the other, a mere closet, having been prepared for her servant.

The parlor was warmed and lighted. The night was clear and cold, with a chilly breeze blowing from the mountains. The small fire on the hearth was delightful. Cecil stood before it, basking in the warmth, her hands held to the ruddy blaze, while the landlord made inquiries after the luggage. As the landlord turned to depart, with Crafton's order for supper, she retired to her own room, whither Gretchen followed her.

The schemer walked the floor until their return, thoughtful, troubled, and deeply anxious.

Cecil had made some few changes in her toilet. Her shabby gown, which had been badly worn during her wanderings, was carefully brushed, her hair was well arranged, and she had procured a fresh linen collar and cuffs through the kindness of one of the chambermaids.

Crafton advanced to meet her, and led her to a chair near the fire. He was gentle and courteous as ever, unobtrusive in his attentions, yet considerate of her comfort in even the smallest things. There was nothing in his demeanor of the disappointed suitor; he was like an affectionate elder brother, expecting nothing and ready to bestow everything.

Gretchen appeared immediately after her young mistress. Supper was soon served, and after it, Miss Rosse and her attendant retired for the night.

The private parlor was the common property of

the party. Crafton sat by the fire until the servant had withdrawn with the tea-equipage, and then he descended to the bar-parlor, where he found the landlord alone, and in the act of closing the bar for the night.

"Give me a brandy-and-soda," he commanded.

His order was filled promptly.

"We will get off on the early train," said Crafton. "Please see that we are called in time, and that a good breakfast is served to us, and that a carriage is in readiness. I will settle the bill now, if you will kindly make it out."

"There was a gentleman here this morning inquiring after you, sir," said the landlord, proceeding to his desk and making out the required bill. "He hired a horse and went after you on the way to Loch Low. Perhaps you met him somewhere, sir?"

"No, I met no one whom I knew," responded Crafton. "My room is opposite the private parlor, I believe. Very good!"

He settled his bill and returned to the parlor up stairs. The lights were burning. The fire was low. He sat down before the hearth and gave himself up to his thoughts.

Presently the door of Miss Rosse's room opened and Gretchen came forth. She carried a little packet in her hand, and her eyes were red with weeping. She approached Crafton with a cautious tread, and spoke to him in a low voice, scarcely above a whisper.

"I hoped to find you here, sir," she said. "My

young mistress is asleep. She dropped off the minute her head touched the pillow. This day's hard ride, after the fatigue and exposure of last night, and her illness of a week at MacDougal's, has been more than she could bear. She'll sleep like an angel until the morning."

"I hope so, I'm sure."

"I am on the way to my room," continued Gretchen, "and it's no treason to my young mistress to stop to speak a word to you, who have been so kind to her. Believe me, sir, she is very grateful—"

"I want more than gratitude!"

"If you would give her time, sir, she would give you love," said Gretchen, earnestly. "She has well-nigh worshiped that false lord who is now married to another; but she is too well-principled to go on loving another woman's husband. If you will only give her time—say a year or two—"

"Say an eternity! I cannot wait a month. I have given up my whole life to her. I think of her, dream of her, adore her. Can you not persuade her, Gretchen, to marry me to-morrow?" he questioned, eagerly. "If you can and will, I will settle an annuity upon you for your life. You shall always have a home with Miss Cecil, and be cherished by us both. You have influence with her—"

"But not so much as you think, sir. She is the lady, I am the servant. It ought so to be, for she is educated, she loves books and ways I do not comprehend, and I was brought up to toil. She loves me, for I was in a manner her nurse in childhood, but she would never allow me to dictate to her, or

persuade her into an action her conscience or judgment did not approve. She thinks for herself, sir, and has a clear head as well as a warm heart. When Miss Cecil says no, she means no. And, to tell you the whole truth, sir, I'm afraid she will never marry you. She has no heart to give you, and she will not marry without love."

"Yet you just now encouraged me to think she would some time love me?"

"That was because I hoped so. My wishes and my judgment conflict. I would give all I have to see her safely married to you, and to know that you stood between her and her enemies like a bulwark of safety. But I dare not urge her, Mr. Crafton. I talked with her this evening about you. And she says that she shall never marry any one. She likes you as a friend and brother. But she has no love for you such as a wife should give to her husband. And then," added Gretchen, "there is that mystery about her birth. It frightened off Lord Glenham, and Miss Cecil thinks it must stand forever between her and marriage."

"That is all nonsense. Her beauty will compensate for lack of birth."

"I think so too. But if Miss Cecil knew that she was of honorable parentage, a great load of dread would be taken from her, sir. I think if you could trace out her relations, she might love you out of sheer gratitude. After what you have already done for her, that would crown her indebtedness, and she could no longer refuse to marry you."

"But how can I trace out her history?" demanded

Crafton. "I have heard the whole story from Lord Glenham in a moment of confidence. How can the man who brought the child Cecil to Zorlitz be discovered after a lapse of fourteen or fifteen years?"

"The good Frau Brocken had been a governess and was very accomplished," responded Gretchen. "The walls of the parsonage were hung with her drawings and paintings. After that man had gone away leaving the child, she sat down and made a picture of him upon a slip of paper—"

"*Ah!*" breathed Crafton, bending forward eagerly.

"My young mistress possesses that picture. It is in this note-book in my hand. After Miss Cecil dropped asleep, I took the note-book from her pocket, where she has carried it for weeks and weeks. She brought it safely from Black Rock, carried it all through our wanderings, saved it in our flight from Loch Low, and here it is! I resolved to-night to show it to you, sir, Miss Cecil's best friend, and ask you to find out who she is, if she has any friends, and all the terrible mystery of her hiding away in the Black Forest. If you can do this, you will place Miss Cecil under obligations which she must strive to repay by becoming your wife!"

"A clever idea, but I fear impracticable. Let me see the picture."

Gretchen opened the note-book and extracted therefrom a scrap of paper which she placed in his hands.

Crafton held it to the light, stared at the picture delineated upon it, started, and uttered an ejaculation of amazement.

The picture was evidently the portrait of an Englishman, and was drawn with spirit and accuracy. It depicted a fair and rather effeminate face, with a low, narrow forehead, small, blue eyes, the left one having a peculiar droop almost amounting to a squint. There was a big mole upon the left cheek which the long side-whiskers could not be coaxed to cover. The mouth, contrasting singularly with the smallness of the nose, was heavy, thick-lipped, and strangely cruel in its expression. Taken altogether, the face was not unhandsome, and could scarcely be termed remarkable. Taken feature by feature it indicated a remorseless disposition, which would stop at nothing in the way of the gratification of its desires.

Crafton actually turned pale as he regarded this picture. His nostrils dilated; he seemed struggling with a profound and terrible agitation. He seemed like one who has made an appalling discovery.

"You know the man?" cried Gretchen, shrilly, all excitement. "You have seen him?"

Crafton gave a last long look at the picture and gave it back into her hands.

"I think I have seen a face like that somewhere!" he said, slowly. "I can't be sure. You must give me time to collect my thoughts."

"But you recognized it—"

"I seemed to, perhaps. I have certainly seen a face like it. Hide that picture, Gretchen. Keep your own counsel, and leave everything to me. I promise you that I will unravel this mystery of Miss Rosse's origin."

"You will, sir?"

"I will. If your young mistress has been wronged, I will see that she has her rights. I will clear the stain from her name. You have done well to trust me. I will win Miss Cecil's gratitude—yes, and her love also."

He rose up, his eyes glistening, his manner still agitated, yet indicative of strange exultation. Gretchen replaced the picture in the note-book, and after a few last words of grateful thanks, returned to the chamber of her young mistress, where, upon second thought, she had determined to pass the night.

Crafton heard the door locked, and then he laughed softly—a strange, triumphant laugh.

"That picture is a revelation," he muttered. "It is a key to the whole mystery. That pastor's wife was cunning. The picture—great heaven!—to think it should fall into my hands! The picture is the portrait of the late Sir Albert Trevor!"

He began to pace the floor with hurried yet stealthy tread.

"No wonder that Lady Trevor schemed to destroy this girl!" he said to himself. "She would have killed her, not because she was her rival in Lord Glenham's affections, not because she feared her fascinations with the earl, but because she dared not allow her again to meet the old Marquis of St. Leonards! The whole ghastly mystery begins to dawn upon me! I have a suspicion as to who this girl really is!"

His excitement had increased to fever-heat.

"By heaven, I am right!" he whispered, almost audibly. "The girl is—but I'll prove her identity

and claim her rights when she is safely my wife. Was ever a more daring game practised? She is more than ever a prize! I'll run no risks—I'll keep her safe as any miser ever kept his treasure. I'll marry her within a week, and then burst the whole thing upon Lady Trevor and Pulford! In a single week all England shall ring with the infamy of those Trevors and worship me as the hero of a romance! In the meantime, I must not forget that Lord Glenham is close upon my track, that he now knows that Miss Rosse is alive and with me, and that he will prove himself a very tiger when he discovers my treachery and her peril. I've a hard task before me," and he smiled exultantly, "but I'll conquer! My pretty Cecil, my Lady Trevor, Mr. Pulford, my Lord Glenham, my proud Marquis of St. Leonards, what would you not, one and all, give for my startling discovery of to-night? I hold the clew to the whole mystery of Cecil Rosse. And I hold you all in my power, in the hollow of my hand, to crush or release, at my pleasure! One person will come out of the game winner, and that person is Maldred Crafton."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SECOND DISAPPEARANCE.

Lord Glenham pursued his journey, reaching the hamlet of Loch Low soon after nightfall. The air was crisp and clear, with a touch of frost in it, the stars shone brightly, and the distant mountains were outlined against the horizon, looking like an encircling wall that shut in this secluded valley from the outside world.

The earl's spirits were in a high state of exaltation. He believed that he would find Miss Rosse in this lonely hamlet, for Gretchen would never have voluntarily become separated from her young mistress. He believed that he would find Crafton here also, since he had not met him on the way to Inverness. He thought of Crafton as his true and devoted friend, who had hastened hither to aid Miss Rosse and to restore her to her lover. No suspicion of Crafton's perfidy invaded his noble soul. He was too honorable himself to lightly suspect dishonesty in another.

He drew up before the door of a shepherd's hut upon the outskirt of the hamlet, and, without dis-

mounting, rapped upon the door with the handle of his riding-whip. The occupant opened the door, thrusting out into the starlight a shock of flame-colored hair, and a stolid but inquiring visage.

"Can you direct me to the house of Mr. MacDougal?" inquired the earl, courteously.

"Nay, sir, it be burnit doon the last night, sir," replied the shepherd.

"And Mr. MacDougal?"

"Is at the house o' his neebor, Angus MacLean," said the shepherd. "The lang hoose wi' the thatched roof beyond the turn i' the road, sir. There be a mort o' people hae coom o' late to see Willum MacDougal," he added, regarding the young earl inquisitively. "I canna ca' to mind when so mony strangers hae coom to Loch Low before."

The earl expressed his thanks for the information rendered, but did not pause to satisfy the evident curiosity of his informant. He rode on through the hamlet, passed the lake which gave name to the group of houses, and came to a halt before the dwelling of Angus MacLean, whose hospitalities to the MacDougal family, to Mr. Pulford and Jarvis, to Miss Rosse, Gretchen and Mr. Crafton, we have already noted.

A farm laborer was crossing the yard on his way from the barn to the house when the earl came up. He informed his lordship, in answer to inquiries, that this was the residence of Mr. Angus MacLean, and Lord Glenham hastily dismounted, gave his horse in charge of the laborer, and knocked loudly upon the kitchen door.

The farmer himself appeared in response to his summons.

The earl inquired for Mr. MacDougal.

"Coom in, coom in," said MacLean, hospitably. "Ye'll find a' the family here. We are a' thegither, sir."

He flung open the door wide, and the earl entered. He found himself in a long, low kitchen, with heavy beams over head blackened by time and smoke, and with a great cavernous hearth blazing with logs. About this hearth were grouped the men of the MacLean family with their male visitors. The women were gathered about a long table, upon which were several tallow candles, and all of them, hostess and guests, were busy sewing homespun cloth into gowns and underwear for the benefit of the despoiled MacDougals.

"Willum," said Mr. MacLean, addressing MacDougal, "here is a visitor to see ye."

MacDougal arose and came forward. The women suspended their sewing, the men paused in their tasks to stare at the new-comer. The stately bearing of the young earl, his fair and noble beauty, his gentle courtesy and air of high and perfect breeding, as apparent here in this lonely Highland dwelling as in the Queen's drawing-room, made a profound impression. His lordship bowed to the sturdy Highlander in polite greeting, and then sent a second long and searching glance about the apartment.

He had expected to find Miss Rosse here, and his

kinsman also. A look of disappointment clouded his visage as he marked their absence.

"Permit me to introduce myself, Mr. MacDougal," he said. "I am the Earl of Glenham, the friend of Miss Rosse, whom I expected to find at your house."

"My hoose, my laird, is burnit doon," replied MacDougal, respectfully. "An' I an' my family are dependant upon the kindness o' a neebor for shelter as ye maun see."

"And Miss Rosse? Where is she? Is she not here also?" demanded the earl, quickly.

"Take a cheer, my laird," said MacDougal. "If so be ye are a frien' o' Miss Rosse, there be mooch to tell ye. Sit doon, mon."

"The young lady is safe?"

"Ay, safe as a bird i' its nest," declared MacDougal. "Hae ye travelled far, my laird?"

The earl, with a great sigh of relief, took possession of the chair MacLean placed for him near the hearth.

"I came from Inverness to-day," he answered. "Is Miss Rosse at the house of some neighbor? Has Mr. Crafton been here?"

"He cam' the marnin'," responded MacDougal. "There hae been the very witches' wark in this matter, my laird. We were imposed upon by the mon Pulford—"

"By whom?" cried the earl, starting.

"Mr. Pulford. An' before him was the mon Jairvis, his accomplice. The young lady hae been shuttit oop a' the past winter i' the loneliest an' most

God-forsaken hoose i' a' the Scottish coast. It was a' the wark o' ane Lady Trevor—"

The earl started yet more violently.

"The work of Lady Trevor?" he repeated, in amaze.

"Ay, so I gathered frae the speech o' Mr. Crafton wi' Miss Rosse. Mr. Pulford com' here yester evening, ca'ing himself Mr. Crafton, an' confairmed the wards o' the mon Jairvis. An' it was a' settlet that they should tak' awa the young lady this marnin', but Providence prevented."

MacDougal, warming with the story, related, in graphic but simple language, the manner of Cecil's arrival at his house, her illness, the appearance of Jarvis, who called himself Dr. Graham, the proprietor of a mad-house, and all the incidents connected with the stay of the young lady and her persecuter under his roof, ending with a description of the burning of his house, the narrow escape of his family from death, and the supposed destruction of Miss Rosse and her servant.

The earl listened breathlessly, not once interrupting the narration, although more than once his anxiety to learn the present whereabouts of Miss Rosse nearly overcame his patience. Only the timely remembrance that MacDougal had declared her "safe and well" enabled him to listen quietly to the long story.

While MacDougal was thus employed, Mrs. MacLean and her daughters were busily engaged in the preparation of supper for the unexpected guest. The MacDougal family and the men of the MacLean

family paid close attention to the narrative, and now and then interpolated an explanatory remark or an ejaculation.

When Lord Glenham had been put in full possession of all the facts in the case, as known to Mr. MacDougal, up to the hour of Crafton's appearance at the MacDougal farm, the Highlander paused to take breath. The earl seized the opportunity to repeat his inquiries for Miss Rosse and his kinsman.

"I am coomin' to that," said MacDougal. "This mornin', when we were a moornin' the death of the puir young lady an' the foreign woman, considerin' the mysterious dispensations o' Providence, Mr. Crafton rode up an' asked for Miss Rosse. An while we were e'en telling him that she was dead, the young lady hersel', wi' her auld servant, cam' oot o' the sma' hay-barn, alive an' well, but pale an' staggering-lik', by reason o' terror an' cauld. Mr. Crafton flew till the young lady, an' there was a joyfu' scene."

"Ay, there was," said Mrs. MacDougal, wiping her eyes. "I' her sorrow an' distress the puir young lady thought only o' this Mr. Crafton, an' the auld woman wrote to him, telling me that he was the only frien' o' her young mistress. He cam' wi' a' speed, and a more woe-struck mon I never see than was he when he heard that Miss Rosse was dead. But when he saw the bonnie lassie coomin' till him, he lookit lik' ane whilk sees a ghaist. He turnit white an' gaspin'. An' then he ran till her, and wad hae taken her i' his arms, but for her modesty. He's a rare luver, is Mr. Crafton."

"A lover!" ejaculated the earl.

"Ay, he luved her. I doot nay it will be a match soon," said Mrs. MacDougal, with an air of worldly wisdom. "He worships the vera ground she steps on—"

"Whilk is a very sinfu' thing to do," interrupted MacDougal, with an air of severity. "Nay doot he luves her well. She is a bonnie lassie, an' will mak' a guid wife, and I hae nae doot they will be happy."

Lord Glenham smiled.

"There must be some mistake," he said. "I know Mr. Crafton thoroughly, and I am sure that his love for Miss Rosse is only a brother's affection. But where are they now? I desire to see them at once."

"That is nae possible," said MacDougal. "Mr. Crafton tuk her awa' this mornin' withi' an hour after he found her."

"Took her away!" cried the earl, amazed. "I did not meet them!"

"They went in a po'-shay toward Inverness. It is strange ye did nae meet them, sin' ye cam' the same gait. It maun be that they wad had stoppit at some farm hoose or inn. The lassie was weak an' tired. She wad nae hae been able to ride the day to toon."

"I am sorry to have missed them on the way," said Lord Glenham, in a tone of chagrin. "I am so impatient to see them that I am tempted to procure a fresh horse and turn back to-night."

"It wad be better to wait till the mornin', my laird,"

said Angus MacLean. "The lassie will nae reach Inverness till the morrow noon, an' she wad rest there the morrow night. Ye look tired yersel'. We hae room an' till spare. Stay wi' us the night, an' gang on your wa' i' the mornin'."

The others joined their entreaties to those of Mac Lean, and the earl, being tired after his day's journey, allowed himself to be persuaded to remain.

Mrs. MacLean placed her hospitable meal upon the board and pressed the visitor to partake of it. He complied, and while he ate his supper MacDougal discoursed concerning his late visitors at considerable length. After supper, the earl resumed his seat by the hearth, while a room in the already crowded house was prepared for his occupancy.

"Ye'll fin' yer frien's at Inverness, my laird," said MacDougal, reflectively. "The lassie will travel slow an' easy, an' Mr. Crafton will tak' guild care o' her. Your harse will be ready to travel i' the mornin.' Sandy, lad," and he turned to one of his sons, "ye can rub down the beastie an' gie him his food. He wad nay be warm at this time."

Sandy departed on his errand.

Mrs. MacLean presently announced that "the prophet's chamber" was ready for occupancy, and, as the hour was late, Lord Glenham arose, expressing his wish to retire.

Mr. MacLean, candle in hand, guided him up stairs to a large room with sloping roof and small quaint windows, and furnished in a primitive style. The bare floor was dotted with a few home-made

rugs. The high-post bedstead was half concealed by flowing dimity curtains. The room was brightened and warmed by a blazing wood fire on the hearth, and a chair had been drawn up in the full glow and heat.

MacLean lingered to answer a few further inquiries of his guest concerning Miss Rosse, and then descended the stairs to the kitchen.

The earl sat down by the fire and gave himself up to thought.

He turned over in his mind the story he had heard. The revelation of Lady Trevor's wickedness filled him with amazement. She had conspired with Mr. Pulford to destroy the life of Cecil Rosse, but what motive had impelled her to such hideous crime? He remembered her unwomanly declaration of love for himself, and his fair face burned. Had that love—had an insane jealousy— prompted her to destroy the girl he loved? Yet what other motive could she have possessed?

Her bethrothal to Mr. Pulford, which had seemed so mysterious, could be explained by the theory that in no other way could she secure his silence. That she loved Pulford was an idea too absurd for consideration. Fear, and fear alone, could have prompted the handsome, ambitious, wealthy widow to marry a man she did not love, who was far beneath her in social rank and station, and who was considered by others as a sort of upper menial in her service, despite the fact that he was by birth and position a gentleman.

And why should she fearPulford to such an extent,

but that he had been the instrument of her wicked will in this affair?

"It seems incredible," the earl said to himself, with a shudder, "but I cannot doubt that Lady Trevor has conspired with Pulford to kill Miss Rosse! What has Cecil not suffered? My poor darling! When we sought everywhere for her, she was hidden in an old house on the northern Scottish coast, in the custody of three bloodthirsty wretches who sought her life! I shall find her at Inverness, and I shall take her directly to my mother! With all her avowed hatred for Miss Rosse, my mother could never resist Cecil's beauty and sweetness. She could never deem her an adventuress when once she had met the gaze of Cecil's lovely eyes! Her heart would go out to Cecil at first sight. I know that Cecil loves me," and his grave face grew strangely tender. "I know that the passionate love I have for her must have awakened a response in her breast. I shall beg her to marry me immediately. I will shelter and protect her from her enemies;" and now his looks grew stern. "Any arrow aimed at her hereafter must find its way to my breast—*not* to hers!"

He remembered the declaration of the MacDougals that Crafton was Cecil's lover, and he smiled again. He knew, by lover's intuition, that Cecil's heart was his, and he believed that his kinsman was acting in the matter as a friend.

He was too excited to sleep. For hours he sat by his fire until the great logs dwindled to a quarter their original size, brooding with a lover's idolatry

upon the beauty and perfections of Cecil. He was restless and anxious—he seemed so near to her in this house in which she had been upon the morning of that very day, and yet so far from her.

"I feel strangely troubled in spite of my great joy," he said to himself, uneasily. "Yet I know that Crafton will take good care of her, and that I shall find her at Inverness. I wonder that Gretchen did not write to me, instead of writing to Crafton. I shall know the reason to-morrow."

It was long past midnight when he flung himself wearily upon the bed. He slept little during the hours that followed, and arose at daybreak, with a strange depression resting heavily, like a pall, upon his spirits.

He paced his floor until he heard sounds below attesting that the household was astir. Then he descended to the kitchen. He found that breakfast was in course of preparation and nearly ready. He went out to look after his horse, and found him in good condition and excellent spirits, well able to perform the return journey to Inverness.

Breakfast was served. After the meal, the earl made his adieux, expressed his thanks for the hospitality he had received, and made MacDougal and MacLean each a handsome present in money. He then mounted his horse, amid the hearty good wishes, loudly expressed, of the entire household and its guests, and departed on the road to Inverness.

He rode briskly, and a little after noon reached the half-way inn before which he had paused on

the previous day to water his horse, and from the window of which Crafton had seen him.

Here he made a halt for dinner. And here he learned upon inquiry that Crafton and Miss Rosse, with her servant, had taken refreshment on the previous day, and that they had been at the inn when he had passed on his way to Loch Low. He learned, also, that the objects of his pursuit had continued their journey to Inverness with but brief delay.

He pushed on, after an hour's rest, with an increasing uneasiness and sense of foreboding.

He arrived at Inverness, and rode into the courtyard of the old-fashioned inn at which Crafton had stopped, just before nightfall.

In response to his eager inquiries, he learned that Miss Rosse, with her servant, and Mr. Crafton, had set out by train on the morning of that day on their way to London, by way of Edinburgh.

He hastened to the railway station and secured his own passage to London by the night-mail train. We need not dwell upon the incidents of that long and tedious return journey.

It is enough to say that he made it without halt, and arrived in London in due course of time, haggard and worn, and nearly exhausted.

Procuring a cab, he drove directly to Crafton's chambers. To his amazement, he was informed by the janitor of the building that his kinsman had not returned from Scotland.

He hastened to Queen's Crescent, Bayswater. Mrs. Thomas, the worthy landlady, received with tears of joy the glad news that Miss Rosse was alive

and found, but declared that she had not seen nor heard from her.

Only one explanation of Cecil's second disappearance occurred to the earl.

Remembering what the MacDougals had said concerning her state of health, he could only conclude that Cecil had been taken ill upon the route and that she had been removed to suitable quarters, where Gretchen and Crafton were in attendance upon her.

He determined to retrace his steps at once.

"I shall find them at Perth or at Edinburgh," he thought. "It seems as if there were some fatality in all this—as if some new obstacle or peril had risen between us!"

He remembered, even in his anxiety, the deep and singular interest which the old Marquis of St. Leonards had taken in Miss Rosse, and was tempted to hasten and tell him of his discovery of Cecil, but he restrained himself.

"I will tell no one until I can bring her safe to London," he thought. "I will spare the marquis my anxieties."

He drove to his house in Park Lane, and saw his mother, but not even to her did he unfold the object of his hurried journeys. In the afternoon, he went again to Crafton's chambers, but his kinsman had not been heard from. Accordingly, he took the night mail for Scotland.

He arrived again at Edinburgh in due course of time. A liberal fee to the guards and station-master procured for him the information that a gen-

tleman answering the description he gave of Crafton—the same gentleman whom he had followed northwards some days before—had alighted from the train at Edinburgh two nights since, with a young lady and her maid in his charge. They had not since been seen at the station.

"They are here, then," the earl thought, his heart giving a great leap. "I shall find them at some hotel, or, if Cecil is really ill, then in private lodgings! The task before me is by no means easy, but with the experience I have had in detective work, I shall not fail to discover them. They are here—now to search for them!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRAFTON'S SUCCESS.

Miss Rosse had started from Inverness for London with Gretchen and Mr. Crafton, as Lord Glenham had been informed. And she had alighted from the train at Edinburgh, as the earl had discovered for himself, after his fruitless journey to London.

What had then become of her, we will proceed to explain.

Weak from her long imprisonment in the old house at Black Rock, with her subsequent wanderings among the grim fastnesses and gloomy passes of the wild northern Highlands, and from the terrors and exposures of that last night at Loch Low, she found herself unable to pursue her journey to London without a halt somewhere for rest.

It was upon a premonition of this fact that Crafton had builded his villainous scheme of getting her into his power. Long before they reached Edinburgh, the villain noticed, with secret exultation, that the pale young face was growing whiter with every mile of travel, that the thin, deeply-fringed

eyelids drooped more and more wearily above the sweet, sorrowful eyes, and that the sad and tender mouth was acquiring a piteous droop indicative of utter weariness and physical exhaustion.

Apparently forgetting his proposal of marriage to her, and his rejection, he devoted himself to her comfort with an assiduity and gentleness that touched Cecil to the heart, and won for him the grateful affection of old Gretchen. He had procured at Inverness a Highland plaid and a railway rug, and these he wrapped about the girl in a manner to affort a support for her head, as well as to shield her from cold. He brought her tea and other light refreshments from the stations where such things were sold ; he was gentle, attentive, yet unobtrusive, and Cecil gave him, now and then, a grateful look ; but he was sufficiently wise not to mistake and overrate the meaning of it.

It was Gretchen who, in her anxiety for her young mistress, suggested a halt.

"Miss Cecil won't be able to travel night and day to London, sir, without stopping," she said. "Would it greatly inconvenience you, Mr. Crafton, to stop over night somewhere ?"

"Not at all," answered Crafton, politely. I am quite at Miss Rosse's service. I think it would be well for her to stop over night at Edinburgh. I should have suggested her doing so, if you had not."

When they reached Edinburgh, Cecil was scarcely able to alight from the coach. Crafton helped her out upon the platform and into a cab, and gave the order :

"To McGregor's Royal Hotel."

The little party were transported thither, and were soon after lodged in comfortable rooms, a pleasant private sitting-room, with bedrooms adjoining, being placed at Cecil's disposal for herself and maid.

Crafton's room was upon an upper floor, and at some distance from those allotted to Miss Rosse.

Dinner was served to the party in Cecil's sitting-room, and almost immediately thereafter Cecil retired for the night, Gretchen accompanying her.

Thus left to himself, with an entire evening before him, Crafton descended to the office and examined attentively a city directory, from which he copied an address. He put the scrap of paper in his note-book, and went forth into the streets, alone and on foot.

He returned at a late hour, whistling softly to himself as he ascended to his rooms, and having the air of one who has achieved a great and longed-for success.

"It is just as I foresaw and planned from the beginning," he mused, delightedly. "As soon as I received Gretchen's letter, and knew that Miss Rosse was in Scotland, I thought of that old beldame. Miser that she is, I have bought her, body and soul, for the work I have in hand. She will render me the service I require, exactly as I supposed she would. Singularly enough, Lord Glenham does not know even of her existence. I was never so frank with him as he was with me," and he smiled grimly. "He'll go on to London, inquire after me, and failing to find me, he'll turn back and look for me here.

So far my tracks are plainly apparent. He'll trace us to this house, but we shall leave to-morrow ; and I defy him, and all the police of this town, to find Miss Rosse after to-morrow. She'll be lost to him and all pursuers—as safely hidden as if she were in her grave."

Cecil slept profoundly that night, without a suspicion of the new trial in store for her. She awakened at a late hour of the following morning, attired herself with care, making her shabby garments look as well as possible, and entered the sitting-room.

Gretchen rang the bell for breakfast.

Before it was served, Crafton made his appearance.

There was an assumed cloud upon his brow which Cecil was quick to detect. She shook hands with him, exchanging greetings, and resumed her seat. Fearing that his gloom might be consequent upon her rejection of him, she forbore to question him.

"I fell quite well this morning," she remarked, in answer to his inquiry, " and am able to resume our journey."

" We will speak of that after breakfast," returned Crafton, keeping up his affectation of anxiety. " And here it comes. Will you permit me to share the meal with you, Miss Rosse, or will you banish me to the coffee room ?"

" Stay with us," said Cecil. " I ordered breakfast, expecting you to share it with us."

The meal was served. After the things had been removed, Crafton assumed a deeper gloom of aspect.

Cecil, with quickening fears, begged to know what had happened.

"Be brave and calm, my dear Miss Cecil," said the hypocrite. "I will tell you all. We have been followed—"

"Followed?"

"From Inverness by Mr. Pulford!" declared Crafton, with an appearance of speaking truth. "He was there when we left. He has pursued us, and the man Jarvis is with him!"

"Impossible! cried Gretchen. "Jarvis went back to Black Rock."

"He started for Black Rock, but he must have changed his purpose and hurried to Inverness for another interview with his employer. At any rate, they are here in Edinburgh. I have been to the station this morning, and both men were there waiting for your appearance."

"But they thought that we were dead."

"Jarvis learned the truth when he passed Loch Low after our departure yesterday morning."

"But you can protect us, Mr. Crafton?" said Cecil, eagerly. "They will never dare harm us in a town like this!"

"You don't know the world yet, Miss Cecil," said Crafton. "You have no idea of the cunning of Pulford. He has been to the police-officer, declared you insane, and procured a warrant for your arrest, and mine also. He has declared also that he is your lawful guardian. He has a policeman with him now waiting for your appearance. Must I tell the whole truth? Through his cunningly-devised

stories, he has secured the support of the law and the authorities. If we go to the station, we run straight into the net spread for us !"

"Then what are we to do ?"

"If we stay here, they will find you. I heard Pulford say to the policeman that, if you did not appear before the departure of the mail-train, they must visit the hotels."

Crafton told this falsehood with such apparent reluctance and such seeming sincerity that Cecil and Gretchen had no suspicion of his treachery. The young lady sat down, white and scared. Gretchen wrung her hands. Both were so ignorant of English law, and both had had such hard experience of English people during the past few months, that the tale seemed to them by no means improbable.

"We are lost !" groaned Gretchen.

"No, no," said Miss Rosse. "We will not wait here to be seized by our enemies. Tell us what to do, Mr. Crafton. We are so ignorant of the country. What can we do ?"

"I should advise our seeking private lodgings in some quiet, respectable house," said Crafton, reflectively. "If we could find some motherly old landlady like Mrs. Thomas, who would keep us a few days until your enemies would be thrown off the scent, you would be quite safe !"

"Can you find us such lodgings ?"

"There is an old lady, a very distant relation of my own, who might receive you as her guest for a few days," continued Crafton. "Let me take you to her. She lives out of town, in a very lonely and

OLD SALLY SEIZED UPON HIM.—*See Page* 345.

secluded house, and, being of a very reserved disposition, has few visitors. No one would find you in her house. No one would dream of looking for you there."

"You are very kind. Let us go now," said Cecil, thoroughly alarmed. "I dare not remain here another hour."

"Then we will go. But we must not take a cab, or leave any clew by which we can be traced. Put on your vails. You must take my arm, Cecil, and we will walk out and mingle with the crowds in the street. I have settled the bill, and am ready to go. We need not delay an instant, unless you wish !"

Cecil needed no second hint. She put on her hat and wrappings, Gretchen followed her example, and the three descended to the private door and passed out into the street.

After walking a few blocks, Crafton unfolded the plaid he carried and wrapped it round the girl's slender figure, which it completely enveloped, serving as a disguise.

A similar plaid, and a new bonnet, which Crafton paid for, transformed Gretchen into a seeming Scotchwoman of the lower class.

Satisfied with the changes these articles made in the appearance of his companions, Crafton hailed a passing cab, and the party entered it. He gave the address to the cabman in a low tone, and the vehicle moved off briskly over the pavements.

They descended steep and narrow streets, Cecil and Gretchen shrinking back in order to avoid

observation, and passed into the outskirts of the town.

"We are almost there," said Crafton, with a quick gleam in his black eyes. "Almost there, Miss Cecil. And once there—once in the walls of my old kinswoman's house, I defy any pursuer to find you."

The cab entered a green lane shut in by high hedges. Here Crafton stopped the vehicle, and assisted his companions to alight. They waited until the cab had disappeared upon its return to town, and Crafton led them a little distance, and finally stopped before a small gate cut in a high brick wall.

"Here we are," he said exultantly; "and you are safe, Miss Cecil. Come in."

He opened the small door, and Cecil and Gretchen passed through. He followed them. Had they but seen the sinister exultation on his face at that moment, they would have turned and fled from him as from a demon.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HEMLOCKS.

Upon passing through the little gate or door in the high brick wall, as we have described, Miss Rosse found herself in an old, neglected garden, dark, dank and overgrown—a very wilderness of weeds and tangled shrubbery, overhung and perpetually shadowed by thick-growing evergreen trees.

The place was chill, damp and unwholesome. A narrow foot-path led among the trees and shrubs from the little door to the house, which, from that point, was not perceptible.

The young girl halted until Gretchen and Crafton had also entered the garden, and the latter had secured the door by heavy bolts upon its inner side.

"Although so near the town, we are completely out of the world, you see, Miss Cecil," said Crafton, looking around him with a satisfied glance.

The girl shivered.

"Who lives here?" asked Gretchen, abruptly.

"An old lady, a very distant cousin of my father,"

replied Crafton. "She is a widow, and her name is Mrs. Malson. Being childless also, and alone in the world, she has grown very peculiar in her ways, but she is good at heart and will befriend you, Miss Cecil."

"Does she live here alone?" asked Cecil.

"Alone, except that she has one woman servant, a crabbed old creature entirely devoted to her, sharing her peculiarities to a great degree. Old Sally is very like her mistress. There is no man-servant, which accounts for the condition of the grounds. But, come; let me take you to the house."

He offered her his arm. Cecil gently declined his support, and motioned him to precede her. He led the way, therefore, along the gloomy path, now and then brushing his hat against obtrusive branches of trees. A turn brought them in view of the house—a dingy brick dwelling, two stories in height, and nearly covered on three sides with ivy vines.

As they approached a side door they could see that the house fronted upon a street much wider than the lane at the rear, and that it was separated from this street by a high brick wall, surmounted, like the rear wall, with broken glass laid in cement. The front yard was filled with thick-growing evergreen trees of considerable size, which nearly or quite concealed the house from the gaze of passers.

The dwelling had an appearance of being uninhabited. The grass around it was scant, the soil showing in many places. A broken piece of statuary, a ruined fountain, and other evidences of neglect, added to the general aspect of desolation.

"The place is called 'The Hemlocks,'" said Crafton. "It deserves the name, as you see."

He ascended the steps and opened the door overlooking the side-yard. He seemed quite at home, as both Cecil and Gretchen noticed. He did not deem it necessary to explain to them that he had visited the house on the previous evening, and had a lengthy interview with his relative and her servant, securing, by liberal expenditure, their coöperation in his affairs. He did not deem it necessary either to state that Miss Rosse was expected to arrive at The Hemlocks that morning, and that preparations had been made for her reception, and that the garden door had been left unlocked purposely to afford them speedy ingress.

He entered a small hall or passage, with doors opening from either side. The hall was at right angles with the main hall, and joined it. Crafton opened a door at his right hand, and ushered Cecil and her attendant into a sitting-room.

"If you will wait here, Miss Cecil," he exclaimed, "I will find Mrs. Malson and acquaint her with your presence, and secure her friendship and protection for you. Excuse me for a few moments. I will return as soon as possible."

He bowed and retired, closing the door behind him.

Cecil and Gretchen looked at each other, half in misgiving, and then glanced about the room.

It was small, with but one window. The carpet was threadbare, the furniture decrepit, the walls mouldy and damp, the old-fashioned paper hanging

in loose strips from it. The ceiling was discolored. The atmosphere of this apartment had the chill of a tomb. There was no fire on the blackened hearth, no ornament on shelves or tables, no superfluity anywhere. The barest and dreariest poverty reigned supreme.

Cecil drew her plaid closer. Even Gretchen, strong as she was, felt the insidious damp and chill of the place penetrate to her very bones.

They waited patiently for some minutes. Then a heavy tread was heard in the passage, the door opened, and a woman entered the room.

She was Sally, the housekeeper and general servant of the establishment.

She was a large, gaunt Scotswoman, a very grenadier in petticoats, with a soldierly tread and martial aspect. She had bright red hair, a pair of keen gray eyes, high cheek-bones, and an extremely long visage, and her heavy upper lip was adorned by an unmistakable mustache.

She looked at Cecil sharply. The girl's pallor, delicacy of appearance, and slight figure, evidently inspired her with contempt. She turned her gaze upon Gretchen, and the sturdy frame of the German peasant woman appeared to impress her as more worthy of respect. Her glance returned to Cecil.

"My mistress will see you," she said, in a gruff, heavy voice, that startled her hearers. "I will conduct you to her!"

The visitors arose and followed her guidance.

She led them to the main hall of the dwelling,

and to a room opening off it. In the best days of the old house, when the late Mr. Malson, who had been a convivial person, had dispensed its hospitalities with a lavish hand, this apartment had been the morning-room. Now, the drawing-room being shut up and altogether unused, this chamber was general parlor, sitting-room and library, all in one.

It was large and well furnished, with relics of prosperous days. The floor was covered with a threadbare Brussels carpet. The whitewashed walls were hung with old family portraits. A book-case filled with books, a writing-table, work-table, and a dozen chairs, all of solid mahogany, and all made in the fashion of fifty years ago, made up the principle articles of furniture. The windows were curtained with faded red damask, suspended by rings from brass rods.

A meagre fire burned in the grate. Before it, in a straight-backed chair, sat an old woman, the mistress of the house.

As Crafton had declared, she was Mrs. Malson, a very distant relative of his family.

She was past eighty years of age, toothless, with a yellow face mapped with a thousand wrinkles, a deeply-furrowed forehead, and a scanty amount of hair of a peculiar yellow white. In vivid contrast to her apparent age, were her eyes, which were small, hard and black, like those of Crafton, but her eyes were brighter than his, sharp in their glances, penetrating, and vivid as burning coals.

She was dressed in a frayed and worn black satin

gown of ancient style, and a frilled cap, that flared away from her face.

Her eyes snapped at sight of Cecil, and she arose with an alacrity that surprised the new-comers, and took a step forward, displaying a shrunken figure which was yet wiry and strong, and full of vitality.

"So this is the young lady!" she exclaimed, in a cracked voice. "You are welcome, my dear, very welcome. Eh? What did you say? Speak a little louder. You can stay here as long as you like. Won't you sit down?"

Cecil murmured a response and took her seat. Gretchen dropped into a chair near the door.

"There's a room up stairs all ready to be occupied," said Sally. "It's curious," and she smiled grimly, "but there's a fire in it! It's all aired and warmed, and at any time the young lady wishes to go up, I'll show her the way."

"Let her be for the present, Sally," croaked the old lady. "Let her be. I like to look at a young face now and then. I was pretty myself once, Miss Rosse. I was indeed."

It was plain that she told the truth.

That withered, wrinkled old visage, which wore a strange look of cunning in every feature, which betrayed greed and avarice as her predominant characteristics, had been beautiful once, and in spite of the repulsiveness of her expression, some faint vestige or reminder of that beauty still lingered, as the perfume clings faintly to the rose when the flower is withered and spoiled.

Crafton accomplished the conventional form of introduction between his aged kinswoman and Miss Rosse. Then, as Mrs. Malson showed considerable vivacity and inclination to talk, he settled himself comfortably in a tall-backed chair, and regarded both quietly.

This was his second visit to The Hemlocks. Until the previous evening he had never seen his elderly relative, but during his boyhood he had heard much of her, had learned her history, and her place of residence. Upon presenting himself to her upon the previous evening, with the knowledge he possessed of her character and peculiarities, he had had no difficulty in winning her consent to aid and abet his plans.

In her younger days when she had been known as "the beautiful Mrs. Malson," she had been a belle. Her husband had been rich, and The Hemlocks had been the seat of hospitality. The grounds had then been kept in exquisite order, the lawns were like emerald velvet, the trees were trimmed and not too thick, and gardeners kept flower-gardens and conservatories in bloom the year round.

But some thirty years since, Mr. Malson had died.

The larger portion of his estate went to his only son, who settled in England with selfish disregard of his mother. A marriage to an impoverished lady of rank cut him off completely from his mother, and put an end to all intercourse between them.

Mrs. Malson inherited from her husband only a

life-lease of The Hemlocks, and an income of four hundred pounds a year.

Unable to maintain her former state, or to keep up her hospitalities, she dismissed her retinue of servants, closed the state apartments of her house, and developed a sudden miserliness of spirit, strongly in contrast with her former lavishness.

Of her entire household, she retained only one servant, old Sally, whose devotion to herself she had proven.

She suffered the grounds to run wild, since they did not actually belong to her. As her son never visited her, having given up his own family for that of his wife, no one interfered with her. Her miserliness grew stronger year by year. She lived meagerly, hoarding her savings, and had many years since made a will, bequeathing her treasure at her death to her old servant. She had informed Sally of this measure, and so won the undying gratitude and faithful service of the old woman.

From the time of that confidence, the two women, mistress and maid, lived but with one interest and one object. They saved and hoarded in every imaginable and possible way. Old Sally sifted cinders and counted coals, and went to bed in the dark, and Mrs. Malson wore her old gowns to the last degree of shabbiness, and pinched her stomach, and denied herself all company ; and added pennies and shillings and pounds to her hoard, which the pair counted over together in the long evenings with greedy delight.

Old Sally never longed for the time when those

savings should be hers. In her way, she loved her mistress, and she made the old lady the chief object of her existence. She became greedy and avaricious also ; she repelled visitors so sternly that after one call at the garden-door of The Hemlocks, they were only too thankful to escape and never came again.

It must not be supposed that Crafton had come to his kinswoman with full avowal of his villainy, or with a frank statement of his schemes. He had told her that he loved a young lady named Miss Rosse, that Miss Rosse desired to hide from an enemy, and that he sought a secure asylum for her, for which he would pay liberally. He had dropped a hint, however, which he expected to spring up like seed dropped upon fertile soil and to bear fruit in good time, to the effect that he would gladly pay one hundred pounds to any one who would assist him to induce or constrain Miss Rosse to become his wife.

That hint had lingered in Mrs. Malson's mind ever since, and she had discussed it at great length with her old servant.

"The boy has money and a home," she had finally declared, "and the girl has not. She is a fool if she refuses to marry him. How can people live without money ? I wouldn't do a dishonorable thing for the world, Sally—you know me well enough for that. I am a gentlewoman and I trust I have a proper sense of honor, but I can see no harm in persuading this young lady for her own good."

"Or in constraining her either," said the bolder

Sally. "A young thing like that don't know what's good for her, and ought to be thankful to older and wiser persons for compelling of her. That's what I think. And a hundred pounds is a lot o' money!" she added, reflectively.

"A large sum—a very large sum!" sighed the old lady. "And somehow, Sally, with all I've saved, I've got an idea I shall come to want yet. I ought to have that hundred pounds. I might starve, for all my son cares since his marriage. I ought to look out for myself. And it is not doing wrong to secure to this foolish girl a handsome husband, a good home, and plenty of money. A little constraint, such as parents often use, would be quite proper in so good a cause!"

"Certainly, mum. And the young lady'll live to thank you for it," declared Sally, who had no sense of honor, and whose bolder spirit generally contrived to lead that of her mistress. "Mr. Crafton, your nevvy, ma'am, wouldn't advise you to a wrong thing. I'd carry out his wishes."

But Mrs. Malson had not announced her decision when Miss Rosse arrived.

She regarded the young girl with a sort of pitying tenderness.

"Sit nearer the fire, Miss Rosse," she urged. "It's chilly. It's a frightful expense to live in this climate. If I were not so old, I should not use coals in May;" and she sighed heavily. "I hope you will like The Hemlocks. At any rate you'll be safe here. I never see company!"

"I am sure I shall find it a safe refuge," said

Cecil. "The house seems hidden away out of sight among the trees."

"Ah, they do grow so fast! But there's no use in trimming them, or doing anything to the place. It is only mine for life. It was a gay house once, in the old days, but it has seen its best, as I have seen mine."

Cecil was interested in the old lady, and her stay at The Hemlocks promised to be not devoid of pleasure. She remained in the parlor for half an hour, and when old Sally again offered to show her to her room she accepted the offer and arose.

"Did you bring your luggage?" asked Mrs. Malson.

Cecil replied that she had no luggage.

"But you will want a change of clothes."

"I have money," said the girl. "If you will kindly allow your servant to purchase what is needed for Gretchen and myself, I shall be indebted to you."

"Oh, I'll do it!" said old Sally. "It won't do for you to be seen outside these grounds."

The housekeeper conducted the guests up-stairs to a pleasant chamber with bedrooms adjoining. The furniture was old and quaint, the windows were thickly curtained, and a warm, bright, sea-coal fire glowed in the grate. Crafton had insisted on fires to warm the long-unused rooms, and had left money to pay for the necessary fuel. No damp or chill lingered about the walls, as old Gretchen observed with inward thanksgiving.

Miss Rosse gave her commission to Sally, with

money for its execution, and the housekeeper withdrew.

"What a strange house this is!" said Gretchen. "And what a strange old lady! I think she is not quite what she was in her younger days, Miss Cecil. Time does tell upon people!"

"She is very kind to receive us!" said Cecil. "I do not like to be so deeply indebted to Mr. Crafton. He puts me continually under fresh obligations to him, and I feel guilty of base ingratitude because I cannot marry him. There never was a gentleman more noble, kind, or unselfish!"

"If you only could and would marry him, dear Miss Cecil," cried faithful old Gretchen, "I should be the happiest woman alive. If we go back to London, that Mr. Pulford will find you there. You will never be safe again—never—except in a home of your own, with a husband to protect you!"

"Hush, Gretchen," said Cecil, sorrowfully. "I shall never marry. Mr. Crafton knows this, I think, and his kindness is not given in a hope of payment."

She sat down before the fire and gave herself up to thought.

Meanwhile, in the lower room, the old lady had turned to Crafton, upon Cecil's withdrawal, and said, eagerly:

"She's a pretty girl, Maldred, a bonnie lassie. I don't wonder you love her. What a pity that she's so poor!"

"She is rich in youth and beauty, madam."

"No doubt—no doubt. I'll keep her as long as

you wish on the terms we arranged last night. You can stay here, if you wish, also. Sally has prepared a room for you. If you use your opportunities well, you can win the girl easily."

"And if she refuses to marry me?" said Crafton, bending forward and looking full into the face of his aged kinswoman. "I have risked my life in rescuing her from her enemies. I have spent months in searching for her. She ought to marry me out of gratitude, if for no other reason. But suppose, in spite of all I can do or say, she chooses to play the coquette—what then?"

A sudden agitation convulsed the sharp features of the old lady.

"I'm an old woman," she said, tremulously. "My mind isn't as clear as it used to be. I can't quite judge what is right. The girl is beautiful. I have taken a great fancy to her. If I only thought the marriage was really the best thing for her—if I only knew it would be quite right to coerce her into it—I could easily tell what to do. You are younger than I—you are a young man with a clear head and a good heart, I know—and you love her. Tell me, Maldred, would it be right, absolutely right, for me to endeavor to coerce her into this marriage with you?"

"Quite right, madam."

"Upon your honor, sir?"

"Upon my honor as a gentleman."

The old lady drew a long breath of relief.

"And you would be very good to her?" she questioned.

"I would cherish her as the apple of my eye. I would worship her!" cried Crafton, solemnly, his swarthy face glowing.

"I don't care for the hundred pounds in comparison with this young girl's happiness, although I'm poor, and, for all my son would care, I might starve. I'd like the money, but I won't do wrong to obtain it. Once more, Maldred," and she looked at him sharply, with eyes that seemed to pierce to his soul, "you declare, before God, that if I help to constrain this young girl to marry you, I shall secure her happiness as well as yours?"

"I declare it, before God!"

"Then I promise. I will imprison her in her own chamber, if necessary, or feed her on bread and water until her spirit is broken!" cried Mrs. Malson. "I will be harsh to her as any jailer—all for her own good! She shall be your wife, Maldred, if we keep her shut up for years first! You can rely upon me. She shall never leave this house until she goes forth leaning upon your arm as your bride!"

CHAPTER XXX.

REUNITED.

Lord Glenham devoted himself to the renewed search for Miss Rosse with an ardent zeal that seemed determined to compel success.

First of all, upon leaving the railway station he visited McGregor's Royal Hotel. And there he found upon the register the names he sought—Maldred Crafton, Miss Rosse and servant.

Further inquiry elicited the fact that these persons had left the hotel on the previous day, and had not since reappeared.

The earl hastened back to the station and made still more rigid investigations. He visited the other railway-stations. It was plain that those whom he sought had not departed from Edinburgh by train. He feed the station-masters, guards and porters liberally, and gave his address at the Royal, and requested to be informed immediately upon the appearance of Crafton at the station.

He then visited the other leading hotels of the town, including several private ones, and, of course, met with no success. He made a tour of boarding

and lodging houses, but nowhere could he find a trace of those whom he sought. They had disappeared mysteriously, utterly and strangely, as Miss Rosse and Gretchen had disappeared in London several months before.

In this dilemma, not knowing where next to look, he bethought himself of a friend—a Scotch lord who lived in Edinburgh. As he was also an acquaintance of Crafton, it was quite probable that Crafton had gone to him for advice in regard to lodgings. Acting upon this idea, he visited his friend—a cool-headed Scotchman, with his full share of national sagacity—and laid the case before him. The Scot listened attentively, made several inquiries, and formed certain conclusions quite at variance with those of Lord Glenham.

"I haven't seen anything of him," he said, "and from your account I am quite sure that I shall not see him. It is my opinion that Crafton is after the young lady himself. Wait! Don't interrupt me. His conduct in visiting Zorlitz last autumn, unknown to you, his secrecy in regard to that letter from old Gretchen, a dozen little incidents you have mentioned, confirm my belief. Women are sharp-sighted creatures, quick to scent a love-affair, and not at all likely to be taken in in regard to one. The opinion of that Mrs. MacDougal that Grafton is Miss Rosse's lover is likely to be the true one."

"I cannot listen to an opinion that reflects upon my friend," said the earl, coldly. "I think he has taken Miss Rosse to some quiet lodging, where she can rest after her fatigues and excitements."

"Perhaps," said the Scot, skeptically. "But why didn't he show you that old woman's letter, if he is honest, Glenham? He's deep and treacherous, and you'll discover the fact for yourself. He's playing a deeper game than you've any idea of. I never had a very high opinion of his sense of honor anyhow. If I can help you in any way, command me."

The earl courteously declined the proffers of assistance, and went away to work out the problem by himself.

Notwithstanding his faith in his kinsman, the words he had heard produced a deep impression upon him. He reviewed Crafton's conduct in his own mind. He remembered Crafton's secret return to the Black Forest in the preceding autumn. Trifles that had seemed at the time of their occurrence light as air, now recurred to him with surprising weight. He was annoyed at himself, but the doubt of Crafton had been skillfully planted in his soul, to rankle there, and not all the assurances of his treacherous kinsman could have rekindled or restored his former faith in him.

He resolved to prosecute his inquiries alone, without the assistance even of his Scottish friend.

The task he had undertaken proved Herculean. Having no clew to work upon, nothing but failure could result from his efforts.

Since sagacity and perseverance could not avail him, chance came to his assistance.

Upon the evening of the second day of his search, he was walking in the Canongate, grave and thoughtful, and deeply anxious, turning over in his mind new

theories and plans of procedure. The hour was yet early. The stars were shining, the street-lamps burned brightly, the shop windows were illuminated and two slender opposing tides of pedestrians were moving to and fro.

Suddenly the earl started.

A little in advance of him, among the moving throng, he beheld a tall, thin figure, closely muffled, strolling with evident aimlessness in the direction of Holyrood Palace. The figure, its carriage and gait, were too familiar to him not to be recognized upon the instant. It was that of Maldred Crafton.

The earl made a quick, impulsive movement forward with the intention of overtaking and accosting his kinsman. Then his new doubts and distrust of Crafton obtruded themselves, arresting his movement. With a sudden cautiousness, he determined to follow his treacherous friend, keeping himself unseen. He turned up his coat collar above his ears, drew his hat over his eyes, to guard against recognition should Crafton turn around, and settled his gait in accommodation to that of the villain.

His precautions were well taken. Crafton looked around more than once to make sure that no one had remarked him or was following him, but in spite of all his astuteness, he failed to recognize or even to note his patient pursuer.

Smoking a cigar leisurely, Crafton strolled on enjoying the fresh air and the sight of humankind.

He had been shut up in the damp old house at The Hemlocks for three days, seeing no one but its inmates. He had kept up his fiction that Cecil was

pursued, and the girl was only too grateful for the shelter afforded her. But Crafton had tired of the gloomy rooms, the dark house, the dark and tangled garden. He had tired of inaction. He had tired of his aged relative, who, avaricious and greedy as she was, was, in spite of her promise of co-operating with him, not quite the pliant instrument of his will he had expected her to be.

The old lady had taken a violent fancy for her young guest. The girl's exquisite beauty and sunny temperament had revived in her delightful memories of her ownl ong-past youth. Then, too, Mrs. Malson was a gentlewoman by birth and breeding, and no love of gold could quite smother her sense of honor. Crafton began to think that he should need to find another asylum for his young charge.

"Miser as she is," he said to himself, as he walked along, puffing at his cigar, "the old woman has a conscience, and a terribly inconvenient one I am likely to find it. If there's to be war—and it looks like war now—and Cecil utterly refuses to marry me, I shall have to find other lodgings for her. But where? That's the question. I might buy up the old woman Sally. I don't believe her conscience is made of such rigid material as that of her mistress. The old housekeeper may suggest some place in which I can cage my prize and persecute her into acceptance of me. By Jove, since my discovery of that picture of Sir Albert Trevor in Gretchen's hands, since love and greed unite to urge me on, I'll stop at nothing—*nothing*—but I'll force Cecil to become my wife! But my old kinswoman is an

arrant coward withal. I must change Cecil's quarters to-morrow !"

Wrapped in a sense of false security, Crafton continued his walk to the palace. Then plunging into a street at right angles with the Canongate, he pursued his stroll, trusting to the deeper gloom of this narrower avenue, and not pausing again to look behind him. Turning corner after corner, he hurried into the suburbs of the town, and reached, at last, the quiet, green lane, with high banks and hedges, which ran at the foot of Mrs. Malson's garden.

And after him pressed Lord Glenham in close pursuit. The earl did not penetrate far into the lane, pausing in the shadow of a hedge-bank just as Crafton paused before Mrs. Malson's garden gate.

The villain gave a swift, keen glance up and down the lane, then, seeing no one, inserted a key in the lock, opened the door, and passed into the garden.

The earl came up rapidly, and arrived at the garden entrance in time to hear the receding footsteps of Crafton as he neared the house.

The earl tried the door. It was fastened. He attempted to scale the wall, and being lithe and agile, succeeded in doing so, to the great detriment of his garments. His hands were protected by thick gloves, which were torn to shreds by the broken glass on the top of the wall, but he heeded no obstacle, and presently dropped safely to the ground within Mrs. Malson's garden.

He paused a moment to take his bearings. Then he followed the path that led to the house, and came

within view of the side door at which Cecil had entered. All was dark and deserted upon this side of the dwelling.

He passed around to the main entrance.

A light streamed from between the folds of the heavy curtains of Mrs. Malson's morning-room. Other lights gleamed faintly from the upper windows.

Lord Glenham boldly mounted the steps of the main porch and sounded the knocker loudly.

After a brief delay, during which he repeated his summons more peremptorily, steps were heard upon the bare floor of the hall within, and a voice demanded who was there. The earl replied by a third cannonading with the knocker.

There was some hesitation, a sound of parleying, the rattling of bolts, bars and chains, and then the door was opened cautiously to the extent of a few inches, and old Sally peered out, again demanding who was there.

"I am Lord Glenham," replied our hero, quietly. "I wish to see Miss Rosse."

The housekeeper, in indecision, turned to question her mistress, who had advanced into the hall. The earl put his shoulder to the door and coolly entered the dwelling.

"I beg your pardon for my unceremonious entrance, madam," he said, courteously, removing his hat, and fixing his gaze upon the aged mistress of the house, "but I must see Miss Rosse immediately!"

Before Mrs. Malson could answer, there was a

rustling sound above, a struggle between Cecil and Crafton, both of whom had opened their doors in alarm, and then Cecil, her red-brown hair streaming, her face wild, startled, but luminous in its splendid beauty, came flying down the stairs. Crafton, cursing, followed her.

Cecil approached within a few paces of the earl, and stood, pale as death, while he, not less pale, held out his arms to her in a joy too great for words.

"Stand back, my lord!" cried old Gretchen, sternly. "How dare you come here? How dare you look at Miss Cecil like that—you who are a married man?"

"Married? I married?"

"Yes, to Lady Trevor," said Gretchen, fiercely. "Oh, Mr. Crafton has told us all about it. We know your deceptions—"

The earl turned to Cecil, his fair face glowing with passionate love and tenderness.

"It is not true," he said, impetuously. "I am not married! I never loved any one but you, Cecil. Come to me, my darling. Come!"

He still held out his arms to her. The girl hesitated, trembled, then, with a strange, glad cry, sped forward, and was clasped to his breast.

There was a long silence, during which Crafton gnashed his teeth in an awful fury, while Mrs. Malson and her servant stared, with a dawning comprehension of the truth.

"Get Miss Cecil's bonnet and wraps!" said the earl, at last arousing himself, and turning to Gretchen.

The woman obeyed.

"And now, false friend," said Lord Glenham, calmly, turning to Crafton a stern and sorrowful visage, "we part here forever! After all your baseness and treachery, we can never meet again. I leave your punishment to your own conscience."

Crafton made no answer. A wild idea of attacking his kinsman and knocking him senseless occurred to him, but the earl was stronger than he. He put his hand toward his bosom in quest of a revolver, but old Sally, who had been watching him, seized upon him with the grasp of a grenadier and held him as in a vise.

"There'll be no murder done here," she muttered. "Go, my lord. There's the key of the front gate on the nail near the door. Go!"

The earl needed no second bidding. Taking Cecil upon his arm, and followed by Gretchen, he hurried down the front garden and into the street.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DISPOSED OF.

It was evening. Lady Trevor was alone in her drawing-room. She was expecting Mr. Pulford, and had denied herself to all visitors but him. The apartment was brilliantly lighted, and she wore a magnificent toilet in honor of his coming. Diamonds, set in quivering sprays, glittered in her black hair, and diamonds, in rivers of light, encircled her throat, her arms, her fingers. Mr. Pulford liked display, and she had adorned herself as a bride for her lover.

But her face was not like that of a bride. Her hard black eyes glittered with a strange and sinister light. Her handsome features wore a hard and desperate expression. She was restless and uneasy, starting nervously at every sound, and now and then her hand unconsciously moved to her breast clutching at the two death-laden phials hidden beneath the folds of lace and velvet.

Unable to sit down quietly, she paced the entire length of the room again and again, and approached

one of the windows, parting the curtains and staring intently into the street.

"He ought to be here," she muttered, restlessly. "He telegraphed that he would arrive in London this morning. What if he has failed, after all? But failure is impossible! He has succeeded—and his success is his death-warrant!"

She resumed her uneasy march to and fro, setting her full, red lips together in a grim and rigid line.

Suddenly, as she walked, with bent head, at the far end of the apartment, she heard the sound of an arrival, the closing of the outer door of the dwelling, and the tread of feet in the hall. She started and advanced swiftly down the room, arriving midway its splendid length as the door opened and Mr. Pulford entered her presence.

He paused an instant, as if dazzled by her appearance, and then hurried forward to greet her. She submitted to his embrace, but did not return it.

"When did you return from Scotland?" she asked, as he released her, and she retreated a few paces from him.

"This morning," he answered. "I was dead tired, completely used up, and have lain in bed all day. How magnificent you look, Edith! Like a very queen! Is all this splendor for my eyes or have you company?" and he glanced around him hastily.

"I dressed for your eyes, Horace," said the widow, with hypocritical kindness. "I will see no visitor this evening but you!"

Pulford looked at her sharply. This new amia-

bility on her part took him by surprise. She had rebelled against a marriage with him; she had treated him with scorn and contempt; he had heard her unwomanly avowal of love for Lord Glenham, and her declaration of hatred for himself; he had read her aversion to him in her eyes; and, having endured so much, had resigned himself to her present hatred, promising himself revenge upon her when he should become her lord and master. Her new kindness made him suspicious.

"You are not yourself to-night," he observed, cynically. "It is not like you to deck yourself in war-paint and feathers simply for my eyes. What does it mean, my dear Edith? What treachery are you up to?"

The widow winced slightly. Could he read her soul? She pretended to pout, to hide her quick apprehensiveness, and said, as if aggrieved:

"Treachery? How can you accuse me of treachery? I don't pretend to love you; I don't pretend that a marriage with you is to my liking, but since you went away I have resigned myself to the inevitable. I am too proud to let people think me an unwilling bride. If I must marry you, I will appear willing and happy. And, besides," she added, with seeming frankness, "I am not so unwilling as I was. Lord Glenham scorned my love, and I want him to see that I am not wearing the willow for him. And, more than all, I have suffered so much anxiety in regard to that girl, that I am glad to marry you out of sheer gratitude for ridding me of her."

This explanation seemed plausible. Pulford's suspicions were disarmed.

"I am glad to see you sensible at last," he remarked. "I love you, Edith, and nothing on earth would ever tempt or compel me to let go my hold on you; so, you see, you do well to resign yourself to the inevitable."

They had seated themselves, side by side, upon a sofa. And now Lady Trevor asked the question that had occupied her sleeping moments for days, and that had trembled on her lips from the moment of Pulford's entrance—that question upon which Pulford's fate, unknown to himself, depended.

"Tell me," she whispered, "what was your success? Is the girl alive or dead?"

"Dead!" answered Pulford, with sinister exultation. "Dead, my dear Edith!"

"Dead!"

The woman trembled with her great and evil joy; her dark face flamed, and one trembling hand flew to her breast and clutched at the death-laden phials hidden there.

"You did not suppose that I would fail to accomplish the object of my journey, I hope, Edith? I never fall in anything I undertake," said Pulford, complacently. "The girl is not only dead, but her body is obliterated—not a bone so big as that diamond pendant on your necklace remains of her."

Lady Trevor stared, incredulous.

"It's a long story," observed Pulford, "but I'll put it in as few words as possible. My journey

northward was the luckiest undertaking of my life. But for it you and I would have been ruined!"

"What do you mean?"

"The girl had escaped from Black Rock."

"Escaped! Great heaven! Escaped?"

"Yes. I arrived at Inverness and hired a horse, intending to make the journey across the country by the wild Highland passes to the northwest coast, and to Black Rock. But on the evening of the day I left Inverness, at a little mountain hamlet by a lake called Loch Low, I, strangely enough, encountered Jarvis. It was a singular chance, that of our meeting. He told me that the girl was in a farmhouse close at hand, with her old servant, and that they had been there over a week; that old Gretchen had written to Maldred Crafton to come to her mistress' assistance, and that Crafton was looked for every hour. The old idiot—I mean Jarvis—had had no opportunity of sending for me without going to Inverness, as the post leaves Loch Low only once a week, and he had stayed on, not knowing what to do, but on the point of doing something desperate, when I, with my usual luck, appeared on the scene."

"And Crafton?" cried Lady Trevor, eagerly. "Did you see him?"

"I passed him on the road the next morning; or rather, he passed me as I was hid in a thicket, and he rode by in a carriage. But the girl was disposed of before that time."

He told the story of Jarvis' pretensions to being the proprietor of a mad-house, of Cecil's illness at

MacDougal's farmhouse, and of all the incidents of that night in which the house had been burned down.

Lady Trevor listened in a breathless horror.

"And you are perfectly sure that she could not have escaped?" she questioned, when at last she could find breath.

"I wish I was as sure of gaining the title I covet," answered Pulford. "Sure? I'd risk my life on it, Edith. If you had witnessed that fire, its swiftness, and appalling suddenness, you would never ask so senseless a question. The girl is dead, and so is the old woman! And as for the family who slept below, they barely escaped with their lives!"

"It was a bold and daring deed, but it was well done," said Lady Trevor, warmly. "I could have done it myself. I wonder what Maldred Crafton thought when he arrived at the ruined home and found that the girl was dead. Do you suppose that he will learn of your visit there?"

"He will not know my name, for I usurped his and called myself Mr. Crafton," said Pulford, with a laugh at his own cunning. "But if he did trace my identity under that borrowed plumage, he couldn't prove that I fired the dwelling. I have covered my tracks well, Edith. Whatever Crafton suspects he'll keep to himself, since he can prove nothing against me!"

"When did all this happen? You came direct to London after its occurrence?"

"No, I was detained two or three days at Inverness. My horse fell under me just before I reached

the town after my visit to Loch Low, and I was slightly injured, enough to lay me up at the Caledonian a couple of days and put me under the doctor's care. As you may imagine, I kept very quiet, not stirring out of doors lest I should meet Crafton, and when I came away on the train I muffled myself carefully and secured a compartment to myself. But, in spite of all my precautions, the hour before I left Inverness I was discovered at my hotel by Jarvis—"

"By Jarvis? You said he returned to Black Rock!"

"I said that we separated, he going toward Black Rock and I setting my face toward Inverness. And that was true. The rascal started for Black Rock. But he had gone little over two days' journey when he came upon the dead bodies of his wife and the Portuguese woman in a wild mountain-pass. The two women had been frantic with fear on being left alone at Black Rock, he supposed, and had set out on foot to follow him. They wandered on the trail for days, then their provisions must have given out, and they, half starved and feeble, had at last perished miserably by the wayside. I tell you the story briefly. Jarvis was half beside himself with grief. The beggar must have loved his wife. Yet he left her unburied as she had fallen with her companion, and stricken with terror, he wheeled about and hurried after me. He passed through Loch Low at night and saw no one. He had just reached Inverness when I saw him, and he came on

to London by the same train with me, but in a second-class compartment."

"So the two women, Mrs. Jarvis and Maria, are dead, too?" muttered Lady Trevor. "That is well. We shall have nothing to fear from them."

"Nothing. They have served our purpose, let them perish. We need not fear Jarvis. I think he'll leave the country, he's so cut up about his wife's death. The way he described the finding of those two bodies, huddled up in the road, would have made your flesh creep. The women must have been frenzied, or they never would have attempted to cross the country on foot, and in such cold as they must have found. Why, the snow lies thick in some of those passes now!"

"I feel as if I could breathe freely at last!" said Lady Trevor.

"Thanks to me, my dear. Our marriage-day approaches. Are you ready? Is the momentous affair of the trousseau duly settled?"

"Everything is ready!" answered Lady Trevor, with her hand at her breast, an odd smile on her hard lips.

"I am glad to hear it. I suppose that grandpapa shows no sign of relenting?" said Pulford, airily.

"None whatever. But I expect overtures from him. I am his only living descendant, and I have played a filial part lately toward him that must have won upon him, notwithstanding his old dislike of me. Besides, I have had a visit from Lady Glenham. The earl, of course, never told her of the little scene between him and me in this drawing-

room. She had heard the report of my betrothal to you and had come to ask me if it were true."

"And you told her—"

"That it was true—that I intended to marry you. I told her that ours was to be a pure love-match, that I found in you my very ideal of manhood," said the widow, speaking half truth and half falsehood. "The countess sighed; she had wanted me for her daughter-in-law; she even shed a few tears, but in the end she gave me her blessing, and promised to do her best to reconcile my grandfather to me. I wish her joy of her task. I would rather face a lion in his den than the old Marquis of St. Leonards when he is angry! Yet Lady Glenham may induce him to keep up an outward semblance of friendship to me."

"She has influence with him, and may induce him to come to a truce with us. Have you seen the earl recently?"

"Not lately. He has left town, his mother said, upon another of his wild-goose chases. He is fast becoming a monomaniac in regard to that girl. If he should ever discover that she is actually dead, I presume he'd go mad entirely. I hope that I shall never see him again."

"We will go abroad directly after our marriage, Edith, and remain away at least a year. And when we return we'll enter society, and grandpa shall use his influence to get me a title. That is all I shall need to complete my happiness."

He took one of her hands in his in lover-like manner. It was cold and clammy, and trembled with

suppressed excitement. As he remarked upon this, Lady Trevor drew away hastily, exclaiming :

"Have you not told me exciting news? Do you suppose I can hear such things unmoved? The truth is, I have scarcely eaten anything since you went away, Horace. I have lived in a state of constant anxiety that deprived me of all appetite. But, now that all is safe, I begin to feel hungry again. Let me order supper to be served, and we will share it together."

Pulford assented. The proposition was one that Lady Trevor had often made to him before. He had shared in many "little suppers" at that house during the past year.

He arose at her request and touched a bell, summoning a servant, to whom the lady gave her orders.

A few minutes later, when the widow was in the midst of an account of some amusing occurrence that had transpired in town during his absence, the butler announced that supper waited.

Mr. Pulford gave the widow his arm, and they descended to the breakfast-room—a smaller apartment than the great dining-saloon, and more suited to a tête-à-tâte repast.

Lights glimmered softly in this luxurious room. The oval table was laden with delicacies. Lady Trevor dismissed her servants, and exclaimed gayly :

"I remember your fondness for coffee, and shall pour a cup for you with my own hands. And you shall mix the dressing to the salad. I remember

that Sir Albert used to say that no Frenchman could equal you in dressing a salad."

Pulford accepted his usual task, and set to work with an ardor worthy of a gourmand. Lady Trevor watched him a moment, saw that he was absorbed in his work, and then, still keeping her eyes fixed upon him, silently withdrew one of the phials from her breast.

With a sleight-of-hand movement, she turned half the contents of the little bottle into one of the cups. Then, hiding the phial again, she gently manipulated the coffee-urn and filled the cup with the fragrant beverage.

"There," said Mr. Pulford, pleasantly. "I flatter myself that this salad will delight you. Let me help you, Edith."

He did so, and received the cup of coffee from her hands. Had his eyes dwelt upon her face, he would have noticed her grayish pallor, her livid lips, the uneasy glitter of her guilty eyes—but he did not look. His usual "luck" had deserted him.

Lady Trevor trifled with her salad and biscuits and fruits, and watched him stealthily while he drained his cup of coffee, and passed the cup for more.

"The coffee is strong to-night, unusually so," he remarked, "and I will take a double supply. I want to visit my club after I leave you. I have an appointment with your lawyer—our lawyer, I mean —and I am about due there now."

Lady Trevor refilled the cup.

There was a little more conversation and Pulford arose to take his leave.

"I will look in upon you in the morning," he said. "Our marriage-day is close at hand. Good-night, Edith, and dream of me!"

He kissed her with love-like ardor, again and again, and then made a last adieu and departed, humming a tune.

Lady Trevor returned to the drawing-room, her knees trembling under her, her heart throbbing wildly.

"It is done," she whispered to herself. "Had I given him the full dose he would have died upon the instant. Half the contents of the phial means as surely death, but grants an hour's reprieve. He will die elsewhere; there will be no scandal; and I shall never be suspected of killing him. The deed is done—his doom is sealed—and I am free!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SECRET DISCLOSED.

It was the custom of the old Marquis of St. Leonards to rise at an early hour of the morning. Coffee and rolls were brought to him in his library, where he spent hours in writing, and in study of parliamentary debates and speeches. At eleven o'clock he was served in the breakfast-room with a solid repast, after which he was wont to go forth upon pleasure or business.

At an early hour, therefore, on the morning subsequent to the event narrated in the preceding chapter, Lord St. Leonards was seated in his library hard at work. The tray had just been removed, and he was at his desk revising a speech of peculiar brilliancy to be delivered in the House of Lords that night.

His political career had been very successful, and he was now at the zenith of his fame. His name was a household word throughout the kingdom. He was identified with his party, a favorite with his sovereign, hated by his opponents, and adored by

his followers ; one of the most talked-of men in England. He had reached the height of his ambition, and was a power in the land. Surely he ought to have been happy.

But the grand, haughty, leonine visage, with the piercing eyes set deeply under shaggy white brows, with the stern mouth shaded by a heavy white mustache, with the massive forehead furrowed with lines of care, was not the visage of a happy or contented man.

His political success could not satisfy his heart. His great house was empty and desolate, and so was his heart. People spoke of him as haughty and domineering, devoid of feeling, and never dreamed of the aching void in his soul, nor of the long, sorrowful hours when he mourned for his lost little grandchild, the idol he had worshiped, the tiny creature he had expected to become the prop and stay, the comfort and the joy of his declining years.

His pen travelled swiftly over the paper. He was in the midst of a sentence intended to carry dismay into the ranks of the opposition, when a servant entered with noiseless step, bearing a salver on which lay a visiting card.

The old marquis raised his head with an ominous frown.

"Have I not told you, James," he demanded, sternly, "that I am not to be interrupted in the morning—that I will see no visitors ?"

"Yes, my lord," quavered the footman ; "but you said, my lord, as you would always see Lord Glenham—"

"Lord Glenham? Is it he? Show him in, James."

The footman hastened to usher the young earl into the room. The marquis met his kinsman near the door and grasped his hand warmly.

"I am glad to see you, Gordon," he exclaimed, and his kindling face attested his truthfulness. "Your mother told me that you had gone off upon some new clew. What luck have you had, my dear boy? You look changed—is it possible that you have good news?"

"The best of news!" declared the young earl, joyously. "My dear old friend, you have assisted me in my search for Cecil. Rejoice with me. She is found!"

"Found? Alive?"

"Alive and well. We have just arrived in London by the Scottish night-mail. I dared not take her back to her old lodgings, for reasons I will explain to you, and I cannot take her to my own house until I shall have prepared my mother to receive her. In this dilemma, remembering your interest in her, and knowing that your house will be a safe refuge for her, I have ventured to bring her to you!"

"To me? Where is she?" cried the marquis, excitedly.

The earl stepped to the door, and at his summons, Miss Rosse, followed by her old servant, entered.

The old marquis met Cecil with outstretched hands. He drew her to him with a fatherly tenderness and kissed her pure young forehead.

"I am glad to see you, my dear child!" he said, in

a voice full of emotion. "Glenham has done well to bring you to me. My house and my heart are open to you."

Cecil's heart warmed to the grand old lord, and with a pretty impulsiveness she put up her sweet young lips and kissed him.

"Cecil is my promised wife, my lord," said the earl, proudly. "I beg you to receive her as such—"

"Gladly, my dear boy," said the marquis, thrilling strangely under the glance of the girl's red-brown eyes with the golden glimmer in their sombre depths. "I congratulate you on having won her. Sit down, Miss Cecil. And now tell me—I am burning with impatience—where have you been hiding all these months?"

"Let me tell you that, my lord," said the young earl, gravely. "If you will kindly allow Cecil to be shown to a room where she can rest for an hour, I will improve her absence by explaining the entire mystery."

The marquis touched a bell, and ordered the housekeeper to be sent to him. Upon her appearance, he placed Cecil in her charge, requesting her to pay personal attention to the young lady's comfort. He escorted Cecil to the door, and watched her with a strange, yearning gaze as she disappeared down the long hall with the housekeeper and old Gretchen.

"How beautiful Miss Rosse is!" he exclaimed, returning to the earl. "Her gaze goes straight to my heart, Gordon. I never told you, I think, but

her eyes are very like a pair of eyes I worshiped once, deep, sweet, tender eyes. You have done well to bring her to me. And now what is all this mystery? Where has she been all these months?"

"She has been a prisoner, my lord, in the hands of wicked people. She has been immured in a lonely house on the extreme northwest coast of Scotland, guarded by murderous jailers, who sought her life," said the earl, solemnly. "The story is almost incredible. Let me tell it as briefly as possible."

He rehearsed the story of Cecil, relating all her experiences of the past few months.

The marquis listened with a countenance expressive of horror.

"Who is this terrible enemy who sought her life?" he demanded, when the earl had concluded. "Who is this monster who would have killed an innocent young girl?"

The earl hesitated

"It was Lady Trevor," he said, slowly, after a brief pause.

"My granddaughter?" cried the marquis, aghast.

"Yes, my lord. And Mr. Pulford was the instrument of her guilty will."

The marquis sat as if stupefied.

"A murderess?" he said huskily, after a long and awful silence. "My God! To think that one of my blood can be so base, so lost to honor, so utterly lost and vile! A murderess? What object could she have had in Miss Rosse's destruction?"

"You had shown an interest in Miss Rosse, my lord," suggested the earl, "and had avowed your intention of adopting her and making her your co-heir."

"But Edith is immensely wealthy. Even if she were a Borgia, that would not have seemed to her sufficient reason for destroying Miss Rosse. She must have had some other motive—some more powerful one. What can it have been?"

The earl reddened. He could not tell the marquis that Lady Trevor had avowed a love for him—Lord Glenham—and that jealousy might have given impulse to her wicked hatred of Miss Rosse.

"There must be some other reason," continued the marquis, musingly. "But pardon me, Gordon. You look worn and tired. Let me send you up stairs to rest. I will have breakfast sent up to you. You will find me here when you come down."

The old lord summoned his butler and gave his guest into his charge.

Left to himself, he paced his floor with a gloomy, thoughtful face.

He reviewed in his own mind all the story he had heard. He recalled the features of Cecil's exquisite beauty, and tried to fathom, by guess-work, the motives that had animated Lady Trevor in her wicked attempts upon Cecil's life.

"Could she have been prompted by jealousy?" he asked himself. "Or had she some deeper motive still?"

The more he thought upon the subject, the more bewildered he became. The whole thing was a puzzle beyond his capabilities of solution.

Finally, he determined to cut the Gordian knot by applying to Lady Trevor herself for an explanation.

Miss Rosse and the earl made their appearance in the library soon after he had eaten his second breakfast, to which, as may be imagined, he brought little appetite.

The marquis made known his decision, and requested his guests to accompany him to Lady Trevor's house. Cecil grew pale but assented. The carriage was ordered, and the little party, including Gretchen, who entreated to be allowed to accompany her young mistress to the house of that "dreadful woman," set out for the widow's stately residence.

As they quitted his door, a woman in black, who had been about to ascend the steps, halted, listened to the order the marquis gave his coachman, and then moved rapidly away.

The woman was Sarah Peters!

Upon arriving, the party was shown into Lady Trevor's drawing-room, and Lord St. Leonards' card was taken up to his granddaughter.

Lady Trevor made her appearance almost immediately. She looked worn and haggard, her black eyes glittered, her lips were bloodless. She was very nervous, starting at every sound.

She ascribed the visit of the marquis to one of two causes. Either he had been persuaded by Lady

Glenham to restore her to some outward appearance of his favor, or he had heard of Pulford's death, and had come to her in consequence.

She did not notice Cecil or Gretchen at first, but approached the old lord, with an artificial smile, extending her hand.

The marquis stood up, stern and solemn, his hands behind him.

"Edith," he said, in a voice that startled her, "permit me to present to you—Miss Rosse."

Cecil arose, throwing back her vail.

The unhappy widow staggered back, with a gurgling cry, staring at the girl as if she had been a Gorgon.

"My God!" she muttered, clutching at the air. "Alive! If Pulford were only here!"

She caught hold of a chair to keep herself from falling. She comprehended that ruin and disgrace had come upon her. For a moment her despair was equal to her horror. Then, as she remembered that the dread secret of her life was still safe, she tried to command herself.

While she was struggling for self-possession, Gretchen stood up, her rugged features convulsed with agitation, her long, bony forefinger outstretched and pointing at an oil portrait hanging on the wall.

"The picture!" she gasped. "It is the likeness of the man who brought Miss Cecil to the parsonage at Zorlitz! It is the picture of the mysterious guardian of my dear young lady!"

"It is the picture of Sir Albert Trevor!" ejacu-

lated the old marquis, excitedly. "What does this all mean? Speak, Edith. Confess the truth. Who is Miss Rosse?"

Lady Trevor looked as if turned to stone.

The door opened softly and Sarah Peters glided in. She had followed Lord St. Leonards in a cab, and had forced her way past the servants into the drawing-room. She appeared now upon the scene like an incarnate fate.

"I can answer that question, Lord St. Leonards," she said quietly, drawing all eyes upon herself. "I have been to Paris, to Germany. I have solved the whole mystery of Miss Rosse!"

"What is it?"

"Fifteen years ago, Lady Trevor adopted my child, or pretended to do so, under an assumed name at Baden-Baden," said Mrs. Peters. "My child was a girl three years old dying of marasmus."

The marquis started.

"I parted with my child through the direst poverty and distress," continued Mrs. Peters, "and Lady Trevor, under her assumed name, talked so fair that I gave up my little one to her. I never saw her again until recently, and then in answer to my questions she told me that my child died in Paris. I have been to Paris, as I said. Only one child was there in Lady Trevor's keeping. That child was mine. My Lord St. Leonards, the little child you buried in your ancestral vault was not the little Lady Alba Ravendale, but she was my own offspring."

The old marquis grew deathly white, and gasped for breath. He looked as if threatened with apoplexy.

"I have traced out the whole fraud from the beginning," said Mrs. Peters, "and I have proofs. Here they are, "and she exhibited a packet of documents. "I leave my reward to your own generosity, Lord St. Leonards, but here are the sworn proofs that the girl whom Sir Albert Trevor took to Zorlitz, and left there at the parsonage, was actually the Lady Alba Ravendale, your grandchild, my lord, and heiress."

Her words carried conviction to the marquis' soul. He took a step toward Cecil, and then opened wide his arms to her, his grand old face transfigured with a joy too sublime for words.

Lady Trevor's haggard eyes, full of profound despair, glared around her. Her hand went gropingly to her breast.

"Is there anything more?" she said, huskily.

The door again opened, and two men, in plain clothes, but with the air of policemen, entered. Lady Trevor turned her glaring eyes on them.

"Madam," said the foremost, "we have a most unpleasant duty to perform. We arrest you in the name of the Queen, for the murder of Horace Pulford, who died last night at his club-house?"

A horror-stricken gloom fell upon the group.

"Pulford dead?" exclaimed Lord Glenham.

"He is dead, my lord. He expired in great agony about midnight. The physician who was summoned to attend him certified that he was poi-

soned, and Mr. Pulford made a dying statement to the effect that Lady Trevor had poisoned him at a supper at her house some two hours previous. Mr. Pulford's relatives have taken up the case. We must trouble your ladyship to accompany us."

Lady Trevor gave a second gurgling cry. Her countenance was frightful in its gloom and despair.

"It's all up!" she said in a hoarse voice. "My secret is out. Everything is wrested from me—reputation, liberty, wealth, even life itself. The felon's cell, with which *he* threatened me, has opened its door for me. The gallows waits. I have but a last word for you, Lord St. Leonards, since Mrs. Peters has all the proofs of her statements, since denial is useless. I own that Cecil Rosse is actually and truly the Lady Alba Ravendale, your grandchild and heiress. It was Sir Albert Trevor who planned that fraud, and who carried it into effect. To Sir Albert Trevor, my husband, I owe my own ruin! I go to meet him among the eternal shades!"

She drew from her bosom the phial of poison that remained to her, raised it to her lips, and drained it at a draught.

The policemen sprang forward to prevent the fatal act, and caught her as she fell forward, in the agonies of death.

She was buried beside her husband, whose evil counsels and evil example had been her bane. The story of her guilt could not be hushed up, but some newer excitement soon caused it to be forgotten.

Cecil Rosse, proven to be the Lady Alba Raven-

dale, resumed her old empire over the heart of her worshipping grandfather. The Countess of Glenham, at first sight, fell in love with the beautiful young heiress, and bitterly repented the pride that had worked so much of woe. She vied with Lord St. Leonards in worship of the lovely young creature whose life had been so strangely shadowed, and Cecil gave her a daughter's affection.

Mrs. Peters received from the overjoyed and grateful Marquis an annuity that would amply suffice for all her wants and enable her to educate her sons.

Crafton never again obtruded his presence upon Lord Glenham. He obtained an official post abroad and buried himself in official duties, soured and embittered by his failure to win Cecil to be his wife, and as unhappy as the strictest justice could desire. He went unscathed by the law, but the knowledge of Cecil's grandeurs and the fact that she is the happy wife of Lord Glenham is a punishment the heaviness of which none but himself can know.

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the little village of Zorlitz, where the inhabitants turned out *en masse*, to greet with rejoicing the happy return of their former favorite and her old servant.

THE END.

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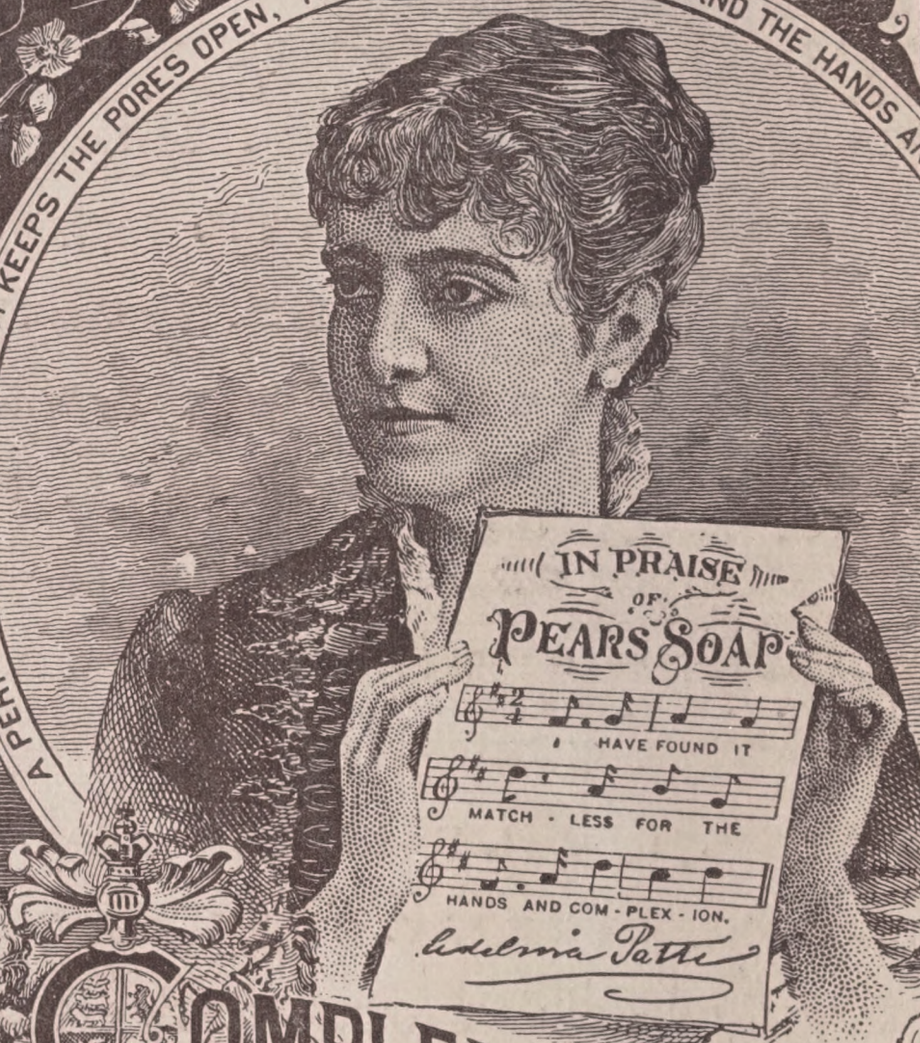
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